THE CAP of YOUTH

BEING THE LOVE ROMANCE OF ROBERT · LOUIS · STEVENSON

JOHN · A · STEUART

The Cap of Youth

Being the Love Romance of

Robert Louis Stevenson

By JOHN A. STEUART

Author of "Robert Louis Stevenson, Man and Writer, a Critical Biography"; "The Minister of State"; Wine on the Leeds", etc.

As readers of Mr. Steuart's fascinating and popular biography are aware, Robert Louis Stevenson had a very passionate and romantic love affair in his early manhood in Scotland, the memory of which affected him to the end of his life. The heroine is a beautiful and brave Highland girl, who sacrificed all for her lover, in fact saved him to himself and to literature by her courage and devotion, her pure, unselfish love. Years afterwards, in the maturity of his powers, Stevenson wrote the story of their great passion for publication, but jealous eyes fell on it, and it perished. In "The Cap of Youth" the story is retold in all its poignancy, its sweetness and dramatic force. Mr. Steuart, himself a novelist of distinction, as Henley, Meredith, and other famous critics testified in praising his early novels, and the author of what the world has acclaimed as the real and only authentic biography of Stevenson, is ideally fitted for the task he has accomplished with so much charm, beauty and power. The youthful Louis is depicted to the life; and the heroine, Katie Drummond, is one of the loveliest and most lovable characters in all fiction.

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To my dear friend
Ida B. Clark from
Minerva Atterbury
Christmas 1927.

THE CAP OF YOUTH

By JOHN A. STEUART

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, MAN AND WRITER:
A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY

THE MINISTER OF STATE

WINE ON THE LEES

THE SAMARITANS

THE CAP OF YOUTH

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JOHN A. STEUART

A very ribband in the Cap of Youth,
Yet needful too; for Youth. . .becomes
The light and careless livery that it wears.
—HAMLET.

PHILADELPHIA & LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
1927

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FIRST EDITION
Apart from the Limited Autograph Edition

PRINTED BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
AT THE WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS
PHILADELPHIA, U. S. A.

NOTE

After many years and in the fulness of his powers Robert Louis Stevenson wrote the story of his great early love. For reasons which need not be stated here it was not then, and cannot now be published.

Hence this story.

THE CAP OF YOUTH

CHAPTER I

A CHILD could have told that he was something more than hail-fellow-well-met with that ranting, revelling company, or, at any rate, with the majority of them. The instant his long, lean face, crinkled in an elfish grin, appeared craning round the half-open door he was greeted with a riotous shout of "Velvet Coat, Velvet Coat. Hooray for Velvet Coat." A lady of seductive mien and opulent, if somewhat shop-soiled charms, motioned him to a place by her side. He bowed grandly, paused a moment as if tasting the full flavor of his reception; then advanced with the airy grace of Prince Florizel of later fame, stooping *sub rosa* to boon companions, male and female.

His spirits, which had been many degrees below zero, rose like mercury in the sun. Ah! here, untainted by snobs and prudes, was the atmosphere to give color and glow to life, the free devil-may-care jollity to quicken the pulse and make the heart-strings vibrate deliciously. Kings might be blessed but this rackety crew was glorious. A trifle hectic, no doubt, these nether regions of Bohemia, with their gospel of hot ginger, their utter contempt for whitewashed convention, but a blessed refuge from sour faces and viperous tongues. A wise man takes his pleasure where he finds it, and here the cup, such as it was, brimmed to overflowing.

"And what is it to be the night, Mr. Stevison?" The voice of the attentive Boniface came like a mellifluous refrain to the tumult of welcome.

"What but the real MacKay?" someone guffawed in answer. "Are we a teetotal society? Inspiring, bold John Barleycorn, that's the stuff to make a man sing 'higher yet my bonnet,' eh, Lewis?"

"Good soond medicine," chuckled Boniface, wiping his mouth with the back of a large hairy hand.

He was a short, squat, flat-faced man, most richly colored, and nobly rotund, as befitted his calling, with thick moist lips, a fixed mechanical smile and a manner that was almost an embrace. Something of Caliban and more of Falstaff you would have said. To his bosom cronies, and he reckoned them the elite of the town's topers, he was simply Toby: but with the license of a chartered comedian Lewis dubbed him Bol-em-over in delicate compliment to the ardent delights he dispensed.

Lewis made a swift mental calculation of his resources. They were low, disgustingly low—leanness of purse was just then the bane and torment of his life—but there was still a modest shot in the locker. If the locker gave out, there was always the convenient device of credit. For happily Bolem was sport enough to "chalk up," pending a renewal of funds. So hey for Conviviality.

"That's the pison," he agreed blithely. "Claret for boys, port for men; the real MacKay for heroes. Let's be heroic. A gill of old Highland, please."

Having thus done the right thing he looked round, sniffing deliciously.

"Heavenly fragrance," he remarked raptly, tongue in cheek. "Give me the incense of the tavern and who will may have the incense of the church." Again he sniffed as if filling his lungs with the sweet odor. "Better than myrrh, yea sweeter than all the perfumes of Arabia. Of

all the gods give me Bacchus, divine Bacchus, the giver of joy. May his shrine never lack worshippers."

There was a shout of acclamation. In the midst of the merry uproar Bolem returned, proudly conscious of his own supreme part in the great scheme of gayety. Promptly filling his glass Lewis held it up against the light, viewing the amber liquor with the eye of a connoisseur.

"Here's our comfort, my gay old bacchanal," he cried, already feeling a rapturous glow in all his members. "Here's to you, my brave Cock o' the North. Coragio, bully monster, coragio, which is to say courage. Never say die while there's good liquor in the land." Then, having toasted gallantly—"When I get rich—heaven hasten the day!—you shall have a statue of pure gold with your beautiful phiz done in onyx and ivory just to set off your delicate complexion, and your fair round belly set forth to glitter in the sun."

There came a chorus of laughter, for, like Yorick, Lewis had the enviable gift of setting the table in a roar.

"Think o' that, Toby, a statue of gold, life size and pented to the nines. Only they'll be for stealin' you man, and meltin' you down. Honest folk are such thieves—when the poliss are out of sight."

"If it's a' the same I'd rather hae the gold in the bank," quoth Toby, and hurried off to serve the commonality at the bar outside. Waifs and strays he called them, mere casual drinkers, to distinguish them from the privileged aristocrats within.

Lighting a cigarette Lewis lay back quizzically surveying the motley gathering. Certainly not a pretty lot. A Reynolds or a Van Dyck would scorn them, though a new Hogarth, desiring tips for a new "Rake's Progress,"

would find them rich in suggestion. Scarcely one of them would be admitted to the outer doormat of respectable Scribe or Pharisee. Respectability was not their cue, thank Heaven! at any rate, not here. Most of them were at odds with fortune and the Ten Commandments, soldiers in the great war of liberation, against the forces of cant and hypocrisy, in which he was himself proud to be a standard bearer. Some day, if they persevered, some radiant happy day, gloom, with all its dismal progeny, would be abolished, and the world would realize that man's chief end is enjoyment, not a cowardly grovelling over sin, whatever that might be.

Suddenly he coughed with some violence, the pungent incense of liquor and tobacco being too much for sensitive lungs. The lady by his side leaned towards him with a look of tender concern.

"Oh! dear, got a cold, Velvet Coat?" she cooed. "It's the terrible weather we're havin' for sure. Rain, rain, rain. You'd think it was planned for the ducks."

Her voice was husky but her manner was softly alluring.

"Very irrigating weather," smirked Lewis, shamelessly stealing from Mrs. Malaprop. The theft and the jest went unnoticed. Lewis grinned. "Casting pearls before swine," he thought scornfully. "The old, old story." Literary allusions were as much out of place there as a costly jewel in a sow's snout. Eh! bien! There were compensations. Human nature in the raw, plus a blessed ignorance which enabled the would-be wit and humorist to thieve with impunity.

Still tenderly attentive the lady by his side went on: "And what have you been up to this long while, Velvet

Coat? You've been sorely missed. Is it writing more poetry you've been?"

He made a fine French gesture of the kind which sometimes evoked the gibe "Frenchy."

"Alas!" he answered. "My poor Pegasus has been a bit spavined of late, which is to say that the star of poetry has not been in the ascendant."

She smiled broadly. "Oh! dear, what a pity. What's gone wrong with the stars? But you're not givin' it up, are you? It's so queer and funny to know a poet. I thought they were all dead and gone long ago." Then studying him more curiously, "Do poets wear long hair and velvet coats, just to be different from other folk?"

"Ah!" he replied loftily. "A patent of nobility, sacred to cultivators of the arts—poets, painters, actors *et hoc genus omne.*"

She laughed a raucous, alcoholic laugh. "I dinna ken Greek. Sounds kind o' silly. But tell me what are you reely doin'? It's the truth we've been missin' you."

He patted her cheek with long tapering fingers.

"Has my dear been lonely?" he asked, his eyes impishly alight.

"There's only one Velvet Coat," she responded archly. "But you haven't told us yet what you've been doin'. Havin' high jinks with the lasses, I'll wager."

He made another of his fine French gestures.

"Full many a lady I have eyed with best regard," he quoted. "But it was no use. I had to come back to you."

She gurgled through all her expansive person.

"Me! Losh think o' that. You like me, Velvet Coat? Folks say I have a fine figure, what do you think? Am I up to the braw ladies of Princes Street?"

"Couldn't hold a candle to you," was the quick answer.

" It's Venus first and the rest nowhere when you're round, my dear. Just to show what I think of you, some day when my muse gets up her pecker, you shall be the heroine of a song."

She made a coy face at him.

"A song. My word, won't I be set up? A ballant all to myself that they'll maybe be singin' in the streets. Watch me blushin'." She looked round the company guffawing hoarsely. " You make braw, braw promises, Velvet Coat, but you're forgettin'. You haven't even asked me to have a drink."

She spoke loudly that all might hear. There was a pause, all eyes bent on him. Then a rippling snicker. He flushed, thinking again, and this time more acutely, of his exhausted exchequer. Curse the curse of an empty pocket. Why hadn't he money like other young men with a taste for pleasure? Lord! if only he had money. The watching insolent eyes seemed to be searing, burning him. For himself, for a chosen crony he might save the situation by falling back on credit. But this! No, it wouldn't do. Even Bolem would sniff and shy. Humiliating, damnable, all because of a pitiful lack of dibs. A pretty position for an amorous knight with a reputation to maintain. Hell to poverty.

With the quickness of her kind she saw his plight, and laughed jeeringly.

" Hard up? Poor boy. Isn't poetry a money-making business, then? Better have a drink with me." And trilling ironically, she turned away. Another girl, giggling in chorus, chipped in.

" I'll give you a tip, Velvet Coat, dear. Never go coortin' without money. It's not fair to the girl." And

with a mocking trill she too turned to other game. They had no use for the destitute.

Lewis affected to be amused, but his laugh, though loud, was wryly on the wrong side of his mouth. Deep down his pride writhed as if struck by a poisoned barb.

He was surprised by a soft voice whispering low in his ear:

"Don't mind them. I'm glad—you didn't."

Turning quickly half round he looked into a girl's face that momentarily stayed the breath in his breast by its fresh bloom and unspoiled beauty, touched by an almost childish innocence. For a moment he gazed in silent, unwinking wonder, all his senses in his rapt eyes. She appeared so young, so utterly, pathetically out of place.

"I hate drinking," she added shyly, as in explanation.

It was on his lips to ask, "Then what on earth are you doing here?" But something in her expression, a half-haunted look as of a timorous appealing child, kept the question back. He regarded her more closely. Even the masculine eye could see that her amazing beauty owed nothing to cosmetics or a deft use of hare's foot. Nature had set her bewitching seal on that lovely face. But what in the name of the seven wonders was she doing there? It was as if an angel had lost her way and strayed by ill luck into Gehenna. And perhaps she had lost her way. Such things happened.

On her part she was equally astonished and curious. Sitting a little behind the lady of voluble and exuberant gifts, silent, miserable, and aloof, she had escaped his notice; but she had noted him, first with amazement, then with a quick feeling very closely akin to sympathy and pity. His singular appearance and odd, extravagant manners immediately arrested her attention. Supposing

Dickens and Dumas had collaborated in a riotous piece of comedy he might have walked straight out of their pages. His lank, ill-jointed frame, his long flaxen hair drooping to his shoulders, his loose Byron collar and obtrusive velvet jacket, much worn she observed, his reedy legs encased in tight trousers a foot too short, his strange foreign look, his swagger, his airs of bravura carried to absurdity—all these seemed to mark him for mirth if not derision. And in fact she easily detected a derisive note in the uproarious plaudits with which he was greeted, or perhaps of condescension towards a Merry Andrew cast for the common amusement. She was at a loss what to make of him. Only this was plain—that he was wholly, radically different from all about him. What was he? Who was he? Why was he there?

"This is jolly good of you," he said excitedly, recovering from the shock of astonishment. "Quite chummy and charming. What's your name, my dear?"

She cast a swift glance round the room as if to see whether they were watched.

"Hush! It mustn't be mentioned here—please."

"All right," he assented quickly, as one who understands. "Another time then and—another place. By the way are you a native of this our delectable suburb of the New Jerusalem?"

She smiled faintly. "Oh! why do you call it that?"

"Because if the city is like the suburb I don't—But, never mind. You're not a native, are you?"

With another furtive look round she shook her head.

"Ah! I thought so."

"How did you guess?"

"By a very simple plan—using my eyes. Our harsh winds have never scorched the bloom off that face, my

dear. Besides I don't think you have our twang, our pipe which, like our winds, is apt to be a bit screechy. You remind me of some people I know far from here. You're not by any chance Highland?"

She gave a start. A new light, as of sudden joy, shone in her eyes.

"How clever you are. Yes, I am Highland. You're not, are you?"

"No, more's the pity. Only I have a theory. Some day I'll explain. Oh! damn that noise."

Someone was telling Rabelaisian stories and the roof rang to the roars of laughter. The girl seemed to shiver, and her face showed unmistakable disgust. More than ever Lewis wondered what she was doing there.

Next minute the other girls rose to go and she rose with them. In passing out she glanced over her shoulder at Lewis, with a smile he was never to forget. It lit up the murky place like a stray gleam of sunshine, almost, as he felt, like a miracle of transfiguration. There was magic in it, and there was mystery, which left his heart beating wildly. A moment he gazed at the shut door, holding his breath. Then, leaping to his feet, he hurried after her, as if drawn by an irresistible magnet. And in truth he was.

CHAPTER II

WITHIN five minutes Lewis was back thrilling to the core, but bravely dissembling his excitement. The wound to his pride was already salved. What was pride in this new, exquisite, magical experience? A girl's whisper, a girl's face, a girl's smile had wrought the miracle which makes all other miracles commonplace, and wrought it as the lightning smites—at a single glancing stroke. Though his head was light and heart and soul quivered as from uncontrollable rapture, it was with well calculated aplomb he took his old seat and looked round the company, smiling saucily as in disdain or defiance of comment. He knew what to expect and it came.

"An enticin' piece o' goods," leered one frowsy boozer, regarding him with blinking red eyes.

Lewis bowed gravely, like an assenting judge.

"And as good as she is beautiful."

The words rang out with the clearness of a challenge.

There was a pause of surprise; then the muffled rumbling of cynics chortling over an outrageous joke. The beauty was beyond question: but the idea of goodness there and then was too incongruously comic.

"Weel, weel ye wern'a slow in makin' up to her," observed the first speaker, bobbing a matted head at Lewis. "Best plan, too. Aye take a lass when she's fain. She might change her mind. No tellin' what they'll do. Another man might step in. Delays is dangerous. Is the tryst for the night, or the morow night, Lewis?"

"Dinna be inqueesitive, Geordie," put in another, heaving with merriment. "Man, it's no' polite. Kiss an' no' tell, that's the style noo adays."

"By Immortal Providence a heavenly truth," cried Lewis. "And add this bit of Gospel, that of all the lovely things it has pleased God to create on this lovely earth the lovliest is a lovely woman."

"Hear, hear, first class doctrine," came the gurgling assent. "Stick to that Lewis. Nature's feenished article when she has learned her job.

Her 'prentice hand she tried on man,
And then she made the lasses, O.

Bobbie knew. Ay and so did Solomon. Think o' the time he had o't among the lasses. Nae stintin' there be a' accoonts."

"Solomon was a king and could hae what he likit," growled a sour democrat who considered kings a grossly pampered race.

"Am no' envyin' Solomon," put in one who was reputed to have more domestic bliss than he could well digest. "Many's the time he must hae been sick o' his woman folk girnin' and snappin' and yammerin'. Think o' him on washin' day. Bad temper, bad langwidge, soap-suds and the rest o't. Nae wonder he took to drink in the end." And Jeremiah solemnly emptied his glass.

"We hae nae soap-suds here, the Lord be thankit," commented Geordie, preening himself for a little gentle baiting. "So dinna be discouraged, Lewis, my lad. Solomon was weak-minded wi' women. Instead o' takin' to drink you just sit doon and write a bittie poetry aboot the lassie. It'll ease yer feelins. She'll like it and do naebody any hairm. I did it mysel in my daft days."

"And had the girl to read it?" inquired Lewis with mock politeness. "Heavens! no love could survive that. By the way did you call it poetry?"

"A nesty ane, Geordie, a nesty ane," chortled a red-

faced man at his elbow who had a private crow to pluck with George. "Weel! Here's t'ye, Lewis. She's a bonnie bit bairn: no disputin' that. A wee thocht bashfu; but she'll get owre that. They all do. You just wire in: only dinna be too greedy."

In a fierce revulsion of feeling Lewis's gorge rose. "Ugh!" he muttered inwardly. "You swine, you leering, filthy, lascivious satyrs." If they took off their boots, what a display of the cloven hoof there would be.

It was like them, of course, to make a ribald jest of innocence and misfortune. What were the mad gods up to that *she* should ever be brought in contact with such foulness? Their humor, their jests! "The hee-heeing of he-goats," he reflected savagely.

It was hard to keep from blurting out his resentment, contempt, and loathing; and indeed he was in peril of exploding when the door opened and one entered to a welcome hardly less rousing than his own had been.

"Cherlie, Cherlie," rang from a score of throats. "Man, it's fine to see ye. Come in by and slooken yer drooth. Here's a seat."

Lewis did not join in the shout: but he leaped up and grasped Charlie by the hand.

"Angels' visits," he said gleefuly, adding *sotto voce,* "I'm damn glad to see you, Charlie."

"Thought I'd find you here," smiled Charlie, as they took their seats side by side. "And how wags the world with you, Lewis?"

"Oh! as you see." Then in a quick confidential aside;

"I have news for you, Charlie, great news, only it must keep just a little while. There's a divinity doth shape our ends, old man. To be continued, as the story papers say."

Charlie's entrance served as a safety valve for over-

charged emotions. When the obsequious Bolem had done his duty, at Charlie's expense, Lewis, quivering and loud-voiced in reaction, gave another toast.

"Once again," he cried, "I give you Tobias Bol-em-over, the king of vintners. You all do know the stuff he sells. When spirits are at zero who sends them bounding up? Bolem. When hearts are drooping and doleful who makes them merry with wine? Bolem. When care shows his wrinkled face who sends him off scudding and ashamed? Bolem. The never-sufficiently to be praised Bolem. Wait a minute."

From a notebook, which he always carried, he tore a leaf, took a pencil, thought hard a moment and then wrote gleefully.

"How's this?" he cried in a thin high voice a trifle shrill with excitement, and read aloud:

Our jolly old Bolem, you see,
Keeps the finest of Scotch barley-bree,
The Elders all drink it,
E'en Ministers think it
The very best booze for a spree.

A resounding shout went up in admiration of the impromptu gem.

"Ver-ry compleementary," cried one eulogist thickly. "Toby man, you're famous."

"Beats Bobbie Burns on his own ground," put in a second. "And done like winkin' too. You're a poet Lewis, a first class poet, that's what ye are. Think o' havin' poetry done aboot ye, Toby, poetry that just fits ye to the nines. Man! we'll hae ye a bailie yet. Bailie Tobias Bolem, Esquire. That's the ticket. Then drunks'll get fair play in the police coorts. There's a new day dawnin' boys."

Mr. Bolem laughed huskily. Often it was his cue to

be obtuse, but never, never to take offence at the pleasantries of customers. And this outlandish, rhyming popinjay with the flowing locks, like a girl's, the queer reputation and the freakish jack-in-the-box impudence enjoyed privileges rarely accorded to the most honored of patrons. But it was worth while; it was even worth long credit or the risk of bad debts. He made people laugh and that was good business. Therefore Bolem smiled wisely, shrewdly, genially, murmuring his appreciation while taking fresh orders.

"A bonnie bit rhyme, nae doot," Geordie commented, with that air of judicious impartiality which marks the hostile critic. "But I ca' it disrespectfu'. Ministers and Elders shouldn' be made fun o'. It's no' becomin'. I ance had a notion o' goin' in for the kirk mysel."

A long and strenuous course of conviviality had painted his face in high impressionist colors, that came to a luminous point in an immense, bulbous nose. Lewis looked at him quizzically, his bright brown eyes alive with mischief.

"What a pity you gave up the notion," he said. "That countenance would keep any congregation warm. Think of the saving in fuel."

A hoarse throaty guffaw rewarded the sally. "Another for you, Geordie, another for you," was the hilarious cry.

Geordie leaned forward, a ferocious glare in his streaky, blood-shot eyes. He was just far enough in the wind to be solemnly self-conscious and super-sensitive on points of dignity and personal appearance.

"What's wrang wi' my countenance," he demanded truculently. "Tell me that, eh. What's wrang wi' my countenance?"

Lewis made one of his best French gestures, an aggravating gesture to an angry man.

"My dear fellow," he replied, with an urbane smile, "I have just said that your countenance is a most excellent countenance. It fairly dazzles me, so that I have almost to veil my eyes in looking at it. I have never seen anything more beautifully illuminated."

"My countenance is my ain," retorted Geordie, his jaws working viciously. "And it's maybe as respectable as yours. But tell me this, how's the wenches in the howff by the Calton Hill, keepit by the Frenchman? I hear the poliss were on yer track the other night and that they nearly nickit ye. I suppose it's there ye get yer fine French manners that you're so proud o' showin' off." He snorted in scornful fury. "You talkin' to me aboot my countenance, you that's a byword and a laughin'-stock to a' decent folk. If my auld horse had your reputation he'd go and commit suicide," he added blowing through his nostrils like an enraged bull.

"An A 1 tip," jeered Lewis. "Be sporting and take a hint from your old horse which must be a beast of sense."

Geordie moved forward convulsively, as if meaning to strike; but a peace-maker, mellow from goodfellowship, intervened. Tuts! was a passing pleasantry to mar friendship?

"Drink to it and shake hands," he said. "That's how to settle differences." And from habit the pair drank, and to their own surprise shook hands.

But it was a truce, not a peace treaty. Geordie glowered at Lewis at if itching to lay hands on him; and Lewis smiled provokingly at Geordie with thoughts of Bardolf's beacon nose and hell fire. Other thoughts, more pertinent to the occasion, also ran through his mind. This blotched, carbuncled pot-house moralist sitting in judgment on him. Hey day, Satan in the pulpit exhorting sinners to repent-

ance. How queer, how damn queer and ironical, that he, Robert Louis Stevenson, with his poet's temperament, his dreams of romance, his exalted ideals and ambitions, should be touching pitch in this fashion. Never mind. It would all be grist to the mill. Some day, some fine day, the world would roar over a new satire, more comic than Aristophanes, more piercing, biting, scathing than Pope or Burns. They little guessed, the besotted fools, what immortality was in store for them.

A silence fell and Bolem, giving ear in the way of business decided to investigate. It might be a prayer-meeting or a Quaker conventicle awaiting the promptings of the spirit. It was his to supply the spirit, and keep merry-makers at concert pitch. Wherefore he entered, beaming genially, to take repeat orders. When they were executed Lewis let himself go as if to prove his ascendancy even in that assembly. With a rush as of devilish inspiration he made lurid jokes, blue and red jokes, impious, blasphemous jokes, and broke into explosive mirth over similar jokes by others. All but Geordie vowed he was the prince of good fellows and an everlasting honor to his native place.

At last, Charlie, a man of peace, though not averse to sport, leaned over and spoke in his ear. Lewis paused in his headlong course.

"By jove, yes," he answered, with a sudden change of tone. "My Dulcinea. I had almost forgotten."

He rose promptly and moved off with Charlie. At the door he turned, with a sweeping Parisian gesture.

"Ta, ta; my joy abide with you." Then with a mocking bow to Geordie. "Alas! I must tear myself away. You are a sheer delight. Only don't forget that tip from the wise old horse." Bowing again over that Parthian

shot he disappeared just as Geordie was reaching for a decanter to be used as a missile.

"No fou but just has plenty," one remarked. "A bit wobbly in the legs. Geordie, ye'd drink him blind and never feel ye'd done it."

"Drink him blind," snorted Geordie with unspeakable contempt. "It would be a humeeliation to sit doon wi' sic a drinker. Him an' his impidence an' Frenchy ways." And to drown his scorn Geordie tossed off a full glass at a gulp.

In the course of the next hour Charlie learned to what heady heights of passion a youthful poet can rise. Even he was amazed, though he fancied he knew the mercurial, inflammable Lewis and his penchant for fireworks. Listening with a smile of benevolent scepticism he wondered whether this were love or whiskey, or both, one working on the other like mixed chemicals. A bit of a cynic, as the practical man is apt to be in the presence of yeasty rapture, he made his own deductions. Don Quixote, he had christened his volatile chum, and here was the brave romantic knight flying his flag defiantly in face of high Heaven. The flawless, peerless beauty, the paragon of excellence, the impeccable, impossible *She* that all poets, romancers, and lunatics, he supposed, discover at some stage in their lunacy was found once again.

Smiling half in amusement, half in pity, he ventured to remark that the fit of ecstasy seemed to have taken Lewis suddenly.

"Suddenly," cried Lewis. "Do you need an age to find out that a girl is lovely? You remember how the Elders saw Helen on the walls of Troy. Just a glimpse, but it was enough. Beauty, my scoffing Thomas, does its work quickly, like sunlight let into a dark room."

"One glance and the mischief is done," said Charlie. "And the charmer's name?"

"If you're sarcastic I'll brain you. She said I might call her Claire. There's a name for you. Claire, why, it's poetry; pure poetry."

"Rapture set to music," grinned Charlie. "And you met her in Bolem's. Sometime I may have the felicity of seeing her there."

"You won't," replied Lewis, with what seemed superfluous emphasis. "Once and once only, my boy. No returning."

"Oh! just sent by Fate to meet you. Who says Providence isn't kind? Does—that select society not please her?"

"It doesn't. How she wandered there I don't know. But the visit is the first—and the last. That's certain."

"A nice intriguing little mystery," said Charlie.

"There may be. Heaven only knows. But if there were a hundred, a thousand mysteries, there is no mystery about one thing, that she is the loveliest girl these eyes have ever looked on."

"Poor worm thou art infected," murmured Charlie. Aloud he said. "And the goddess exquisitely fair consented to an assignation, I take it. Goddesses always were so kind in matters of gallantry."

Lewis laughed spasmodically.

"Right again. To-morrow night, Charlie, to-morrow night. The horrible thing is there must be twenty-four hours' waiting before——"

"A mortal clasps a goddess in his arms," broke in Charlie. "Well! be careful. Divinities are said to be dangerous to mortals."

They were passing the head of the Canongate, a region

of towering slums, pleasantly known as the Royal Mile, in memory of Kings, Queens, and nobles who once made it the path to glory or the grave. At a jutting angle they could see the heavy black mass of John Knox's house. Halting suddenly Lewis pointed downward.

"There," he said as it might seem irrelevantly in the circumstances. "There stands the house of honest, dour, persecuting John who preached hell-fire yet had his regiment of women. At seventy took a bride of seventeen to keep him warm, like David of old. A canty chiel was John in his odd moments. In love with bonnie Queen Mary, the old rip, and because she frowned the whole history of Scotland was changed. Some day I mean to have a shot at John and his retinue of females."

"*Cherchez la femme,*" laughed Charlie. "Search and you'll find a woman at the bottom of most things."

"And pray, my scornful Timon, what were the world without her?" demanded Lewis.

"Certainly no place for poets," was the answer.

They continued downward across the North Bridge, which connects the old town of Edinburgh with the new, and so into Princes Street hard by the Waverley Station. There in gay, unguarded moments Lewis had hob-nobbed with Satan in petticoats, and to-night the strange woman was abroad in all her flamboyant charms. But it was "Avaunt. Get thee behind me." For a haunting, wistful, appealing face, shone high above the murk of the street, an Avatar beckoning him to better and lovelier things; and it was not in his heart to be false to that great ideal.

Falling in with Lewis's humor, but communing privily with himself, Charlie seemed to sniff the brewing tempest. He had seen Lewis in many moods, gay, grave, gloomy, defiant, reckless; but never before so raptly in-

sane as now. Already, as he and the whole town knew (was it not a town's scandal?) Lewis was deeply in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes. If a new chapter of misdeeds, darker, because more passionate, than any that went before, were opened, then God help Lewis.

Too, too obviously he was caught in the vortex of white flame which incites to madness. An ordinary man, Charlie himself, for example, might be expected to get safely over the fit of delirium, as one gets over mumps or measles or other incidental ailments of humanity. But Lewis was—Lewis; an animated paradox, a compound of contradictions, of whom one might always expect the unexpected. It would be as idle to predict his behavior when his feelings were engaged as to foretell the course of a meteor in to-morrow's sky.

Moreover—and here lay the real peril—underneath a misleading veneer of levity he was flint and iron. "My own way, always and in everything," was his motto, and it was unfalteringly honored. What he wished to do he did; what he wanted he took, as the Corsair takes his prize, in kingly disdain for the wishes or feelings of others.

And his prize? His goddess might be all he painted her. But Bolem's! Would anyone believe that anything good could come out of such a Nazareth?

All too clearly Charlie foresaw trouble and more trouble: in fact trouble heaped upon trouble.

CHAPTER III

THOUGH Lewis understood as well as another the invaluable art of hiding, it was with extreme care and caution that all through the next day he managed to dissemble his transports, his feverish preoccupation, and appear rational and commonplace.

But at last, after torments of waiting, the great moment came: and with an airy look of sauntering off casually he slipped away to the trysting place. Once out of sight, however, he almost ran, his heart beating like a trip-hammer, every fibre in his body dancing in gleeful anticipation. What was in store for him? What romance, what unspeakable bliss was the night to bring?

Though he was early at the spot somehow he expected Claire to be waiting for him. That would be a delicate confession of her feeling, her delight in being with him. But—she was not there. His heart missed a beat, then raced giddily. A clock began to strike the appointed hour, and he looked to see her tripping round a corner, radiant with the love-light in her eye. The last stroke died away, and she did not appear. Five minutes, five everlasting minutes, passed and yet she did not come. Ten, fifteen were added, and he watched, straining every sense. In vain. He gulped for breath; his excitement seemed to be throttling him. What, what was keeping her? Had she rued? Could it be that she was making a fool of him? The base thought was rejected almost before it was born. As well suspect an angel of studied deception. She was detained; something unforeseen was delaying her. Very likely she was not full mistress of her time. She would come. Yes, certainly she would come, if she had to tear herself away

from restraining hands. He must have trust. A false thought could not be the thought of Claire. And he was right, despite what seemed to be present proof to the contrary.

At the end of half an hour his trust had oozed to the lees, and mistrust was beginning to rage like a demon in his breast. So his goddess, his peerless one was made of clay after all, common Eve clay. Girls were made of guile, the best of them. Experience ought to have taught him that. Off with someone else likely, someone flusher of cash than he was. No doubt she had taken to heart that sarcastic hint in Bolem's. Money! Prate as they might the rich man was first favorite with the sex. Oh! damn the shortage of dibs. Even Claire turned aside from his poverty. And at that thought his whole manhood surged in revolt. Penury! By all the gods he would burst his bonds, he would, come of it what might. Iago, the villainous, but shrewd Iago, was eternally right. Put money in thy purse. That was the grand secret in love as in all else. An empty purse was simply an object for mockery and insult.

His pulses drummed rebelliously. Claire might go to— There were other girls, plenty and plenty. Lord! were they not ogling him at every street corner?

Yet still he watched and waited. If only she came all would be forgiven without question or word of blame. In reality the splutter of resentment was but fuel to his fire, or more properly a wind that fanned it to a fiercer blaze. Why, why did she not come? He might fume, say fierce, cruel things, yet all the while deep down in his heart he knew she had only to appear and smile, and he would be at her feet.

She did not come; and at last muttering things un-

printable, he wheeled and strode off, his heart a flaming furnace of fury and disgust.

Little as he suspected it she saw him go, and had a dizzying impulse to call out his name and run after him. She had passed the day in a fever even more distracting than his, now resolving, now recanting, and again resolving and recanting, till her brain whirled. A hundred times she told herself that having made a promise she must keep it; and a hundred times revoked.

In the interval she had learned much about Lewis, who he was, what he was, and how his name was soiled by orgies of gossip. Evil tongues did not daunt her: rather were they a challenge rousing her sympathy, spurring her to defence. Well, too well, she knew the fiendish cruelty of Mrs. Grundy and her abhorred brood, with what malice, and slime, and gloating venom, they pursued their victim. Were that all she would go to him in open defiance of scandal and scandalmongers. And why not? Why? Thus she hung, like one poised on the brink of a precipice, fascinated by the terror of the dread leap, while struggling giddily to hold back. And the fascination, it seemed, was too much for discretion. When the time came she went to her appointment, half-dazed, like a dreamer in distress, wondering what would happen next. She felt as if borne along on a rushing tide which carried her blindly, she knew not whither.

And when presently she saw him, herself unseen, striding to and fro in momentary expectation of her coming, she halted with an emotion that paralysed her whole being. It was a terrible moment. As in one flashing instant the battle with herself was fought over again, more bitterly, more fiercely than before. In secret she might argue and resolve to be brave in self-denial: but with *him* before her

eyes, the lover waiting for his love, caution seemed cowardice and prudence a thing to be despised. "Go to him," her heart urged vehemently, "Go to him. Shame on you. Shame on your courage that you hesitate."

She drew a hand across her eyes, as if to shut out an unbearable sight. Yet even then her natural force of character did not fail her. Better, she told herself, it should be thus, far, far better. To yield to her importunate heart would be to lay a train of future misery. That would be the real cowardice. Besides there were other things, intangible but inseparable, in particular a conscience sensitive as an aspen in the wind, a sense of honor that felt a stain like a wound. Both said now with fiery emphasis, "Don't. You must not. It would be wrong: it would be wicked." And she obeyed the inner monitor.

Unable to endure the torture she turned away to compose herself. But when she stole back, like the moth to the candle, he was still watching and waiting. Thrice she did this, feeling the third time that the last atom of her resolution was vanishing. Then, just as she was on the point of surrendering, he turned abruptly and strode off, angrily as she knew. Next minute he was out of sight.

She stood perfectly still, gazing breathless and paralyzed, her throat constricted in an excruciating pain. She would have run after him, calling on him to stop, but her limbs and her tongue alike refused their office. For a moment there was a sound in her ears like the roar of rushing waters. Suddenly it ceased; and she stood rooted to the spot in a vast, enveloping silence, an unutterable loneliness. If Lewis only knew; but Lewis was off thinking her, oh! what did he think of her? More pertinent still, what did she think of herself?

All at once, out of the summer dusk, a voice startled her.

"The auld, auld story, hinny, the auld, auld story. Has he been unkind to you?"

She turned with a gasp, and beheld, an old crone, her head swathed in a ragged shawl.

"They're a' alike, a' alike," the woman added, drawing nearer. "It's what they can get, and then up and awa wi' the best o' them."

A fierce indignation surged up in Claire. "Go away," she ordered peremptorily. "Leave me."

The crone laughed huskily.

"Ye'd fain keep him. That's the madness o' women. Anything for a man. But dry yer eyes, hinny, dry yer eyes. Losh, there's mair fish in the sea, ay, plenty and plenty as good as any that's come out of it."

Claire turned on her savagely. "I have told you to go away. Leave me at once."

Laughing again the crone drew the shawl close about her head.

"Ye needna' be ca'in' the poliss," she cackled, in a cracked alcoholic voice. "They're no needit." Then peering more intently, "Yer unco young to be greetin' a' yer lane for a man. Ance I did the same mysel'. It's a lang while ago. I was a bit lassie then, like you, hinny, and he was—weel never mind. There's a place where the wicked cease from troublin', they say. He's there and I'm here, as ye see. Whiles I dream o' him yet, and then I'm young again, and a' in a sweat wonderin' if I'm braw and bonnie enough for him. Daft, daft. What did he care?"

She laughed hoarsely. "Listen, my doo," she went on, holding the girl as the Ancient Mariner held his victim. "I'll tell ye a wee secret. There's aye medicine for the

sair heart, provided ye hae the money, and that's a dram. Whiskey was invented for the like o' us, my dear. If I was young and bonnie like you maybe a man would take a fancy to me. As it is," she made a ghoulish gesture. "Are we to hae a bit dram the gither then?"

"No, we are not," replied Claire furiously, and sped away in horror.

The crone laughed hideously. "Sweet sleep, hinny, and bonnie dreams o' the lad that's awa'," she called ironically. "And nae greetin' yer lane."

And tightening her foul shawl about her head she went her way croaking:

> Waly, waly but love is bonnie,
> A little time while it is new.

Claire ran faster, every nerve quivering. It was as if she were fleeing from spectres. She was too perturbed, too distressed to perceive that the one spectre she was fleeing from was herself. She did not stop till she reached the place which, God help her, was her only present substitute for home. Halting dead she looked up at gayly lighted windows. A sound of hoarse laughter reached her. She shuddered. People talked of a hell hereafter. Hell was here, now. Another peal of laughter resounded through an open window. She knew what that meant. Oh! God had she come to this? Nevertheless, gathering her forces as for another battle she entered purposefully.

She was met in a garishly decorated hall by a large black-haired, middle-aged woman, voluptuously dressed, jingling with cheap jewellery, and rank with perfume.

"I have been looking for you," said the woman, scrutinizing her sharply. "Where have you been?" and in the next breath. "Weeping again, I declare. Perfectly

ridiculous. Won't do here, my girl. It's smiles we want, not tears. You've been told that before, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Then, why can't you have sense? You're not here to weep and make a show of yourself. One would actually think you were trying to be disagreeable, to say nothing of spoiling your good looks. Go at once and make yourself a little more attractive. Men don't like glum faces. You ought to know that."

"Yes," agreed Claire again: and turned away, her lip quivering.

She went upstairs with the energy of fear and hate, yet feeling incredibly old, passed into the tiny, sordid coop she was permitted to call her own, and locked the door. Then without taking off her hat she sat down heavily on her bed, her hands folded limply in her lap.

"I wish I was dead," she moaned. "Oh! God pity me, pity me. Take me away out of this."

With a gesture of despair she put her hands up to her face and found them wet. Without knowing it she was weeping again, doing what she was forbidden to do on pain of—of what? of starvation. "Hide your broken heart, dry your tears, or starve." That was Fate's grim ultimatum.

She sat motionless, her mind like a wheel that has broken loose and is blindly whirling itself to pieces. Noises reached her vaguely from the street; muffled footsteps were audible on the stairs; doors opened and shut: the mingled voices of men and women in coarse mirth reached her at intervals. It was only subconsciously that she was aware of them, as one is aware of details of familiar routine. Her mind went back to the waiting, watching Lewis, and then by a wild plunge to something else that froze her stone cold.

CHAPTER IV

AS CHARLIE indicated, Lewis did most things to please himself: but a few (such was the cursed force of custom and prejudice), he was constrained to do in deference to others. Into that disagreeable category came attendance on College classes. It was a misfortune he did his best to evade or mitigate: when evasion was impossible he endured with unconcealed disdain and ridicule.

Next morning he set out for the detestable seat of learning with a sense of unspeakable boredom. Even the weather, though it pretended to be early summer, conspired against him. A raw, chill haze, half "haar," half smoke, hung like a damp blanket over the face of the sun, making all things drab and bleak. He thought wistfully of the fragrant warmth of Bolem's tavern; more wistfully still, and much more vividly, of a face that he could have sworn was to be trusted. Yet she had tricked him. A fiery sensation shot through him: but the next moment his head was high and he was humming, defiantly:

> Shall I, wasting in despair,
> Die because a woman's fair?

Already the College bell was clanging out its infernal summons, clang, clang; clang, clang, every stroke a grating insult to free and independent youth. A savage sensation thrilled through him, a fierce desire to throttle the man at the rope's end. He felt it would soothe his feelings just to kill somebody.

Nevertheless he entered the college quadrangle with an easy air of indifference, gave casual greeting to some loafing students, who looked at him and one another with a grin, threw away the stub of a cigarette and slouched

nonchalantly into a classroom. He was late, and to signify cognizance of the fact there came a loud stamping of feet in accordance with a gay old tradition. Smiling as one who does not disdain public attention, he mounted some steps, slid along a bench, and, producing a pencil and notebook, laid them with studied ostentation on the desk before him. That done he surveyed the scene with the amused detached eye of the cynic.

The teacher, an elderly "Stickit Professor," was saying something about the properties of a circle. Conic sections for a poet. What delicious satire. To illustrate a point, the lecturer turned to the blackboard. Lewis, not thinking at all of mathematics, yawned spaciously and loudly. The lecturer paused, chalk in hand, and looked over his shoulder.

"The gentleman is sleepy," he said with ill-judged irony. "He has got up too early."

"It is quite true," agreed Lewis, looking as if he meant to yawn again.

The lecturer turned sharply round, facing him. "Mr. Stevenson," he said, and there was menace in his tone. "Will you be good enough to tell me the meaning of the term Asymptote?"

Lewis assumed an expression of profound regret.

"Upon my word, sir, I don't know," he replied.

The lecturer, still more ironically, "Then I advise you to find out. Examinations are coming."

"As to that, sir," was the unabashed response, "I never think of misfortunes more than I can help."

He smiled urbanely, while the rest of the class stamped.

"Mr. Stevenson," said the lecturer, trying hard to keep his temper. "Please remain after the class to speak to me."

"Very well, sir."

Silent but smiling he bent over his notebook, and for the better part of an hour devoted himself to caricatures of the staff, with piquant inscriptions, mostly in verse. Not a single word about mathematics marred the deliciously comic page. The rest of the class clattered out, and he remained politely; but by no means in penitence.

Fifteen minutes later he reappeared in the quadrangle, smiling as if the whole world shone on him.

"Survived the wigging, eh?" cried a group of his classmates who were waiting for tidings of a sensation. "What happened?"

"Oh," answered Lewis blandly, "He's coming to tea. The gentleman is not without his social instincts—in spite of mathematics."

In the midst of shouts of laughter he lighted a cigarette, and walked on, feeling very much the conquering hero. Near the gate he met another student, Archibald Gutteridge, whom he knew well and gave greeting: but with a hard, cutting stare which said plainly as words, "I can have nothing to do with you," Archibald passed on. He was red haired, pink complexioned, lady-like and most primly proper, a swot in his studies and already a Sunday School light. In reference to Lewis he had lately been heard to remark that he had his own reputation to take care of. The damnatory stare was an intimation to that effect.

Lewis stopped as if struck; then something primitive, savage boiled up within him. "Damn his red head," he said to himself. "They say Judas was red haired," and with a bitter laugh he strode on.

From the University gates he turned downward at a furious pace. On the North Bridge he met Charlie.

"Don't speak to me," was his greeting. "I'm not fit to be spoken to."

"Oh!" said Charlie. "That's interesting. Glad you warned me. What's friend 'Old Nick' up to now?"

"A town's scandal," was the reply. "But I can't explain here. Let's go somewhere. As old *Omar* has it I want 'Something to drown the memory of that insolence.'"

"I know the spot," said Charlie briskly. "I was on my way to a lecture; but I'll cut it. It was only Constitutional Law and History anyway. Come along."

They found refuge in a poky, smoky side street off Leith Walk, a quarter rank with marine flavors. Three sailors occupied a corner with their "gels," joyously disposing of accumulated arrears of pay, the gels loyally aiding and abetting. Two soldiers, with no accumulations to get through, sat a little morosely in another corner watching the jolly sailor-men, and there was a sprinkling of down-at-heel civilians. One or two of these nodded familiarly to Lewis.

Squeezed into a third corner he told Charlie, over a tankard of ale, what had happened in the quad. Charlie listened with interest; but without surprise. He knew his fellow townsmen. He knew too that Lewis never was and never could be reasonably discreet, and that he gave Mrs. Grundy golden opportunities.

"I'm sorry for Erchy," he remarked. "I call him Guttery, he's so sloppy. But what could you expect? The poor fellow's father is a minister. The Kirk must keep her skirts clean."

"I thought," said Lewis bitterly, "that the business of the Kirk was to save sinners like me, not to send us post haste to perdition."

Charlie laughed derisively. "Where on earth did you

get that crude notion? Not in this Community of Self-righteous Saints, surely."

They were interrupted by one of the sailors who came across to them, beaming and groggy, with his gel on his arm.

"S'cuse me, gents," he said politely, wiping his mouth, "But my ole Dutch, I mean my missus 'ere for the time bein', kinder thought as she knowed 'ee."

They glanced at the lady and shook their heads; no, they had not the pleasure of her acquaintance.

"No 'arm done," said the sailor, and as a guarantee of good faith and perfect friendliness he hiccoughed jovially, "Le'me interjuce." He paused like one searching his memory: then turned to the girl, smiling comically. "Blime me if I ain't gone and forgot yer nime, m'dear."

She laughed hoarsely but gayly. "Anything will do, Bill," she assured him. "One in every port, y'know. What is it you generally call them?"

"Lizer," answered Bill promptly. "Better'n Mary Jane or 'Arriet or any of that common truck." And Lizer she was.

"Ye see," he explained, taking a backward and then a forward step. "T'aint every day as a poor bloke of a sailor gets 'is feet ashore for a bust up."

"So he seizes his opportunity," smiled Charlie. "A sailor's home is on the deep, where there are no pubs."

"Blow 'ard, blow soft," said Bill. "The rollin' barmy deep. Shake," he added suddenly, presenting a hand long innocent of soap and water. When both had shaken solemnly he went on, slurring and preternaturally grave. "Rio, Sing'pore, 'Oogly, Cipe, S'uthampton, Rotterdam, Port o' Leith. Dirty 'ole. Stinkin' pubs. Interjuce my mates. Pipe up, and acrost deck. Jolly."

Lewis and Charlie exchanged glances, and next minute with Bill and Lizer leading, they crossed to the rest of the jolly little party.

Honored and elated the sailors rose joyously to the occasion, and Lewis, not to be outdone in good-fellowship toasted them royally in strong waters. Then for one glorious hour he drank deep of stuff more stimulating, more thrillingly delightful than any sold by vintners. As if they were magicians in disguise his new friends threw open magic casements on perilous seas and fairy lands forlorn in a manner unimagined by Keats. They had been everywhere, seen everything, done all sorts of brave and forbidden things. They had chased and sunk pirates in the China seas, helped themselves unstintedly to heathen idols of gold and precious stones, and sold them at bargain prices as mascots to the pious, pagan deities on the cheap, warranted to bring good luck.

"*Porte-bonheur,*" said the electrified Lewis, heedless that his French was wasted.

The rousing tale swept on. Like a child at its first pantomime he listened breathless and quivering to descriptions of shipwreck and maroonings: of days and nights on rafts in the midst of sharks, smacking their jaws for a meal: of little escapades with cannibals and love episodes with dusky maidens (no offence to present charmers), who, the riot of jollification over, lined up on the beach, chastely adorned in native innocence, waving passionate farewells to the tune of "Will ye no' come back again?" Best of all perhaps was a great adventure in search of hidden treasure. Unfortunately the argonauts had not possessed themselves of the heaped up gold: but they had a map stowed in a secret locker; and one day when they

were millionaires, golly, wouldn't there be guzzle and swill? Lewis was enchanted. This beat Crusoe, and the vauntful Ulysses into a cocked hat.

"Crikey! 'ow they squealed," observed one of Bill's mates, chuckling reminiscently. "Sounded like a gels' school with it's back 'air on fire and a burglar under the bed, it did. They ain't sporty, them Chinese pirits."

"Goo' shport shendin' 'em to Davy Shones," hiccoughed Bill, and sang or tried to sing:

> Fifteen men on the dead man's chest
> Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum.

"Nish little chanty, m'dear," he grinned at the girl by his side. "Mind's me of 'ome and muvver a-cuttin' off to the nearest pub. 'Ome Sweet 'Ome."

The girl laughed raucously. "Oh, Bill, you are so funny."

Long before the fervent leave-taking Lewis had forgotten the insult in the quad, and thought only of the joy of roaming the world beyond reach of the Ten Commandments. But it was recalled to him sharply as he stepped into the street. Two clergymen were passing, and one of them was the Rev. Peter Gutteridge, father of Archy. They both looked meaningly at Lewis and his companion, then at each other, and passed on, their backs a dire warning of wrath to come.

Lewis did not care. He was gloriously indifferent to anything the Rev. Peter Gutteridge or his immaculate progeny thought, said or did. For his blood sang, and he was off on far trails, greeting the sun as it came up out of China with promise of typhoons, piracy, and blood-red scuppers. His head was light, he walked on springs, and

forgetting his solemn surroundings he chanted the refrain of Bill's catching chanty.

> Fifteen men on the dead man's chest
> Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum. [1]

"Charlie," he cried. "Think of common sailor folk feasting daily on such adventures while we sneak about in gloom, afraid to breathe for fear of creating a scandal. We don't live at all. We're just human cabbages, bats, moles, shunning God's sunshine as if it were poison, and always mumbling about that hangman's lash—the fear of hell. To the dogs with such physic."

Charlie smiled indulgently. Was Lewis off again on one of his whirlwinds of enthusiasm?

"Good stuff for the story-teller," he observed. "I know your ambitions that way. Here's your chance for a first-class, picaresque sensation. Go ahead."

"How wonderfully great minds think alike," laughed Lewis. "It's been fermenting in my brain like yeast for the last half hour. Cutlasses, pistols, fierce, hairy men, oaths and sudden death, and to crown all—loads of gold. Lord! that I were a Dumas. Never mind, this night, this very night, the man who never works will take off his coat for a little buccaneering, and the ruddier the better."

"Don't forget the lady," said Charlie with mock gravity. "You could never do without a petticoat on board." After a moment he added, "I think you can do it, Lewis, on the word of an honest man, I think you can. Come to a place I know and let us drink success to the great venture."

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[1] Have we here by any chance the germ or origin of a certain tale called "Treasure Island," which in later days almost rivals "Robinson Crusoe" in popularity?

CHAPTER V

TWO mornings later, by a sudden turn of the wheel, Lewis awoke in a small inn snugly tucked between hill and sea, to a world flooded with warm, golden light. A delicious sensation, as of some subtly animating cordial suffused his being. He was exquisitely buoyant, not, as was so often the case in Edinburgh, with a forced, defiant buoyancy, but spontaneously, as birds sing and happy children laugh. The much abused old world wasn't such a bad old world after all—in spots.

Whistling softly, as a man whistles in sweet content, he dressed with some care, admiring the new velvet jacket his mother had providently and secretly added to his wardrobe. That done he threw up the window and leaned out to drink in the sweet morning air. Below a passing maid halted, arrested by his sudden appearance.

"It's falling out you'll be if you don't take care," she warned him, her eyes a merry challenge. She was a neat, bright, rosy damsel, carrying two heavy pails of new milk.

"Good-morning, my dear," responded Lewis gallantly, smiling down upon her. "If I fall I hope it'll be into your bonnie arms."

"And spill my milk? Gosh! We'd catch it then. What makes you get up so early?"

"Oh! just for the joy of seeing you. What makes you?"

"Because I must. I have to do the milking. If I could do as I like I'd stay in bed forever, I think. Are you here just on holiday?"

She asked the question enviously. It was only strangers and tourists who got real holidays.

"Just," he answered. "Do you ever get a holiday?"

"Me?" she laughed. "Oh! yes, when the snow's so deep nobody can get near us and we can't go anywhere. Mercy, there they're crying on me. Don't be breaking your neck, or it's a funeral we'll be having. We churn to-day," she announced over her shoulder. "You'll get fresh butter."

His eyes followed her till she disappeared into the back premises. Quite an innocent, pretty invitation. In the scented twilight, and "the dell without a name," the little milkmaid would be very charming. Oh! yes, the old world was still attractive—in spots.

After a breakfast heartily enjoyed (even appetite was keen), he strolled forth by himself, with a joyous vivid sense of well-being. Certainly the warm sunlight was delightful. Delightful also was it to take long deep draughts of the exhilarating air—a fragrant elixir—drink in the glory of the hills and revel poetically in the "deep, divine, dark, day-shine of the sea," as the alliterative Mr. Swinburne had it. Could heaven be better? The wide translucent spaces, blue and silver, the huddle of iridescent hills, the gleaming, seductive waters, the fisher-folk, the stray shepherds and their dogs, the buxom women folk with tranquil, trustful eyes: a Highland demi-paradise.

At that his thoughts switched back to Claire. She was Highland, perhaps from just such a spot as this. A surge of mingled feelings suddenly swept through him. For the fiftieth time he wondered what her history was, and for the fiftieth time promptly answered it did not matter. The girl herself, not her history, was what counted. "The gem, not the setting, makes the jewel," he told himself epigrammatically. Suppose he and she were here together with none to criticize or say nay! At that thought his pulses began to beat more quickly.

Almost as if she were beside him, he seemed to look into those dark, haunting eyes which were as wells of light. No guile, no deception there he had thought. Yet she had broken her tryst. Could he believe her again, or were innocent appealing looks a fraud, an imposture, like so much else in a world which is seldom what it seems? He would not, in reality he could not, judge harshly. Poor girl! who knew how she was situated or what reason she may have had for disappointing him? And with that a new and startling thought came to him. As in a flash of lightning he saw men as they were, and the spectacle did not make for self-conceit.

"Man calls himself a sportsman when he is only a beast of prey," he reflected, with unflattering candor. And woman, God help her! was always the quarry, the victim.

Human nature, he supposed. Queer mixture, human nature, infernally, supernally queer. An eternal enigma, a universal everlasting satire, a play of clashing passions, ending—in what? Claire was in the net; so was he.

One clear gain came of this new, strange, heart-racking experience; it supplied the piquant ingredients for a certain *magnum opus* of romantic love that towered magnificently in his imagination. Primarily the present trip was scientific—lighthouses and breakwaters, for was he not destined to be a great engineer, following in paternal footsteps? He meant to turn it into poetry, or at any rate to prose at which cock-eyed London critics (Edinburgh had no critics) would not sniff too audibly.

To set his thoughts in tune he sought out a tiny hidden cove, a mere recess among crags and precipices, and there, seated on a sun-bathed rock, with the Atlantic lisping and curling in soft white fringes at his feet, he sketched the

glowing masterpiece in imaginative shorthand. He was busy and engrossed when he was startled by a sudden "Oh!" and a half-amused, half-frightened laugh behind him.

Turning quickly he looked up into the amazed faces of two girls, standing a dozen feet above him. They were carrying bathing dresses. Instantly he was on his feet, bowing, straw hat in hand.

"I am sorry if I am intruding on your preserves," he said, with a politeness worthy of Paris.

"Oh, no," they assured him; it didn't matter, they were only going to bathe.

"I will retire at once," he said in his best manner. "You must not be deprived of your swim. You do swim, of course?"

Yes, they were both swimmers; everybody thereabouts knew how to swim.

"Like seals I'm sure," remarked Lewis. "Well, I'll get off: but when you're disrobed and in your element, would it be rude in me to peep from behind a rock? You won't deny me that enticing sight?"

They did not answer. They were studying him curiously, face, hair, clothes, notebook. He seemed a queer oddity, some visitant from a world evidently peopled by oddities.

"Are you a painter?" one of them asked, hazarding a wild conjecture.

He grinned. "No, a poet."

"Oh!" Their eyes were wide with wonder. "Like Burns, or Scott or somebody?"

"More or less. Do you like poetry?" he inquired, with a smirk of amusement.

Yes, they liked poetry well enough, only they had

never before seen a real, living poet. They thought that only dead people wrote poetry.

"Oh," he said jauntily. "Sometimes living people have a go at it." Then in his most ingratiating tones. "Very pleasant here, isn't it? Suppose we sit down a while before you splash. I'd like to hear your views on poetry—and other things."

They looked at each other, giggled, and sat down close together like children engaging in a new and rather dangerous game.

"Ah! but that won't do," he protested. "I claim the privilege of being in the middle, protected by two graces." Giggling again they made way for him. "That's better. Unexpected bliss is always sweetest," he added, settling himself with a delicious sigh, and curling his queer legs under him. To his companions they suggested storks' legs in ill fitting trousers.

He studied them obliquely, right and left. One was short, plump and auburn haired, with a high complexion and tempting, half-pouting lips. Her name, as he took care to learn, was Mairet Fraser. The other was slender and tall, with jet-black hair, a rich brown complexion, and dark eyes in which seemed to lurk the fires of potential passion. She was named Flora Grant.

"Is it hard work making poetry?" asked Flora. "And do you make your living by it?" chimed in Mairet.

"It's hard work," he replied. "And I don't make my living by it. Not yet anyway."

"Oh! don't poets make much money then?" inquired Mairet, with the slightest lift of an eyebrow.

"Mercenary minded like the rest," thought Lewis. It was money, money, money, always and everywhere money.

Even these charming rustics with the simple country ways, thought of men and things in terms of £. s. d.

"A poet doesn't write for pay," he explained. "Anyway not a real poet."

"What does he write for then?" asked the practical Mairet.

"Mostly to please himself," was the light answer. "Just for the fun of the thing, you know."

"For fun. But you said it was hard work."

"Swimming is pretty hard work, isn't it?" he returned. "You can't keep it up for long. Yet you're keen on putting yourself out of breath—just for fun, aren't you?"

"Quite true," said Flora. "People do queer things for fun."

"The queerest in the world," agreed Lewis promptly. "There's nothing conceivable that people won't do just for the fun of it. Why, they even get married."

"So they do," laughed Mairet. "I wonder if that's fun."

"Ever so many people try it to find out," said Lewis, his eyes twinkling.

From poetry and the marriage question they made a swift turn to more personal matters. Was he just a tourist? And where was he when he was at home?

"Edinburgh," he answered. "Have you ever been there?"

No, they had never been to Edinburgh; they had taken excursions to Glasgow; and weren't the shops just wonderful? But they knew a girl in Edinburgh. Perhaps he knew her too.

"What's her name?" he asked indifferently.

"Katie Drummond," he was told. "An awful nice

girl," added Flora. "And as clever as clever. *She's* fond of poetry."

He searched his memory, mentally going over a long list of names; but Katie Drummond was not on it. He shook his head.

"No, I don't know her," he said. "What does she do? Has she an occupation?"

He pictured her as a shop assistant, measuring out ribbons, or selling corsets to pompous, overdeveloped dames hard to keep in shape.

Oh, yes, she had an occupation. For a little she was a medical nurse in Glasgow; then she went to Edinburgh. They supposed she was still a nurse.

"Is she in a hospital there?" asked Lewis, his interest visibly dwindling.

They could not say, for though she sometimes wrote telling what a wonderful place Edinburgh was and how grand and stuck-up the people were, she never mentioned her work. Likely didn't think it worth while. They expected her back on a visit soon, and supposed she would be a great swell with a lot of fine dresses and hats and things. What a pity he would be gone before she came.

"If you're not going off by to-day's steamer I can show you her photograph," said Mairet, with some eagerness. "Then you'll see how pretty she is and know her when you meet her."

Lewis was charmed. "Shall we say to-night?"

But blushing prettily Mairet explained that she had "another engagement."

"Lucky fellow," grinned Lewis. "How I envy him. Still, no poaching, you know. Well! to-morrow about this time—and here, if the weather is kind. Will that suit you both?"

Yes, they thought that would suit them very nicely.

He was waiting for them at the appointed time, not from interest in the photograph, which he had almost forgotten, but for other reasons. Overnight his muse had been sprightly; and he was eager to delight them with the result—a dainty, sparkling trifle, most artistically wrought, about nymphs bathing and spied on by a naughty watcher. By license of poetic prevision he described how two laughing girls stepped from the ring of their "dismantled citadel" of clothes and slipped into the crystal coolness of the pool.

They listened giggling and blushing. Over the account of the bathers in "nature's toilet" they broke into protests. For themselves they always used bathing costumes. Nice girls would never dream of bathing without them, especially if there was danger of being spied upon. But they were vastly amused, and, as he thought, secretly flattered. Only he noticed with a pang that the studied, and he believed, the felicitous art of his best lines was totally lost on them, though he recited with the most loving care. They told him he was very naughty. As to poetry it must be very, very hard to get the proper rhymes, and he must be very, very clever. What a pity poetry didn't pay.

Promptly he steered another tack. Poetry was lost on them: but they would relish flattery: the sex might be counted on for that, and it was never his way to stint compliments.

"You're no' blate. You're no' blate," they laughed, listening to such language as they had never heard before.

"Blate," he echoed gallantly. "Why shouldn't I be blate? The truth's a jewel, isn't it?"

They laughed again, their eyes sparkling with mischief and merriment. Ah! now he was making game of them. He had better carry his blandishments back to Edinburgh.

The girls there would like them. And at that Mairet suddenly remembered.

"Oh! your foolishness was very nearly making me forget," she said. "Here is Katie's photograph."

He took it carelessly, glanced at it, looked more closely, and held his breath. By all that was incredible! Claire! For a full minute he stared at it in silence, his whole being suspended. Watching intently they noticed his expression.

"Do you know her after all?" Flora asked excitedly.

He made a pretence of not hearing. "By Jove! you were right," he exclaimed, looking into the face in the photograph with the air of a connoisseur examining a work of art. "She is pretty, and no mistake."

"You'll be falling in love with her, like the rest of them," Mairet laughed. "All the men do. It's a wonder she's not married. She must be hard to please."

"Lots of sweethearts, I'm sure," observed Lewis, trying to be non-committal. "What did you say her name is?"

"Katie, Katie Drummond. And that doesn't do her half justice. She's the prettiest girl I ever saw. You just wait till you see her."

All the men were after her, he was told again. Not that she was flightly or anything like that. She wasn't. He recalled the look in those deep, grave eyes as he had seen it. No, he was quite sure she was not flightly. And yet, and yet. He looked up at his companions.

"You don't know her address or what she's doing now?" he asked.

They shook their heads. He regarded them with an odd, questioning look. What would they say if they knew? But they never should know from him.

CHAPTER VI

BY A deft piece of strategy Lewis carried off the photograph under a strict promise to return it when he should have discovered the original. He went too, charged with many endearing messages to Katie, the senders being sure he would soon make her acquaintance. Edinburgh wasn't such an awfully big place, was it? And of course he would be on the lookout for her, and like the rest of the men would be in love with her. Of that they had no doubt. It seemed a cruel satire to carry such messages from those two happy unsuspecting girls to that other girl in Edinburgh who was not happy, but very much the reverse and to whom their messages would be as brine to an open wound. But, of course he would use his own discretion as to delivery—when the chance came.

The chance seemed a mocking *ignis fatuus,* luring on to disappointment. A week passed and he did not so much as catch a glimpse of Katie (instinctively he had discarded "Claire"), though in a studiously casual way he sought her where, he thought, she was likeliest to be found. What had become of her? Had she vanished, perhaps taken fright and run away? Or had worse befallen? He dared not inquire openly, and secrecy, if politic, was excruciating.

Sometimes in his absorption he asked himself by what magic this girl had cast her spell upon him, making him dote on her image, as a famishing man dotes on the vision of a feast? He had seen her but once, casually and briefly, in the murk of Bolem's tavern. She had used none of the black arts, the conventional sorceries of her sex. She just spoke softly and smiled, and lo! the miracle

was done. So, he supposed, Helen made captives and slaves.

True, she had broken her word to him: but somehow the broken promise only piqued and incited, like a challenge. He thought he understood the feelings of the cave man roused to pursuit and capture. Heigho! what a torturing flame, what a delirium of uncertainties it all was.

> I hate and love. Why so? I cannot tell.
> But feel 'tis so, and feel it to be hell.

Secretly he half admitted that, as with Lesbia's immortal lover, the maddening sting was in the thought that another man might be enjoying the felicity which was his heaven. "Jealousy, rank jealousy," taunted something within. "Go to blazes," promptly retorted something else. "Jealousy! what is that but a fool's name for enthralling, all-absorbing love?" Katie was no Lesbia, no Paphian wanton ready to sell her smiles and favors to the next comer. Avaunt jealousy.

Inevitably he tried to find vent for his passion in verse; but poetry, commonly his refuge and secret comfort when driven in on himself by the gross hypocrisy and sodden atrocities of Edinburgh, only inflamed the more, like an added current of electricity, filling his veins with fire. Again and again he took up a lyric conceived in her honor, altering, heightening, with a touch here and a touch there, as his temperature rose or the muse was inspired to some especially felicitous phrase. Mairet and Flora said she was fond of poetry: she should have it hot and original, a little masterpiece of feeling and expression, a song that lovers would sing in far, far days and remember his great love and Katie's.

In such ecstasies it was easy to forget that Katie might never see the masterpiece, that he might never look

into her face or hear her voice again, that she was lost, gone, he knew not whither.

Alas! heavenly raptures are never anywhere the current stuff of life even for the lover and poet. From his gleaming heights Lewis must perforce descend to the dull routine of common existence—to wash and dress, and eat and drink and tolerate bores and grind at irksome tasks, God knew why. And just then of all abhorrent tasks the dreariest, most ludicrously futile were College classes. What were they to him? One hour of crowded, glorious life was worth a world of painful constipated prelections from fossilized professors. He had no earthly ambition to be a savant carrying "loads of learned lumber" in a head meant by Providence for better things.

One morning he set out for the University with a tense rebellious feeling that he had reached the very limit of endurance. The bell, the cursed bell, was clanging its dismal warning as usual. By the way he met some golfers, swinging blithely for convenient links, their golf clubs slung blatantly over their shoulders. Here and there, a stray woman, similarly laden, a gawky, red-faced hoyden, possibly a hermaphrodite, hurried along with the stride of a ploughman. He detested, contemned golf and golfers. Still in their own crude way, those people were off to enjoy themselves—while he—damn little enjoyment for him in the existing scheme of things.

The day was enticingly fine, a day indeed to tempt an anchorite out of doors. The sun shone radiantly: the air was a caressing breeze: the sky serenely blue. On bush and bough the birds were jubilant; the merry voices of children at play pealed through the bloom and greenery of Princes Street Gardens.

"The very day to cut lectures," a seductive voice

whispered in his ear. "On such a day only a fool would think of stuffy classrooms and snuffy professors."

Near the Waverley Station he halted in self-debate, and again the seductive voice whispered, "What have you to do with the stupid ox-heads of the University? You have your own ideals, your own delights. Enjoy them."

As he listened to the siren whisperings, the shriek of a steam whistle came sharply from the depth of the station below: next moment from under the North Bridge the great express engine sent up a cloud of white smoke. The outward bound London train. Its bustling business-like clangor, instinct with the eclat of great things, thrilled through him like a note of mockery. "Stay-at-home, stay-at-home, spiritless stay-at-home," it seemed to mock. "Stick to your piddling parochialism. I'm off to the hub of things, to gayety, to life."

A moment he stood motionless, the clamor of the departing express like a challenge in his ears; then with a swift impulsive movement he turned aside and sped down the long flight of steps to the hollow of the station under its sheer cliff. A local train was going out, and he sprang into it. If it could not be London let it be Portobello. There on the sands, hardened by immemorial waves, the poet if not the lover could pursue his ardors.

There is a rapture on the lonely shore, he quoted to himself, remembering his Byron.

But at the point at which he struck it the shore was not lonely. On the contrary it was noisy with flocks of children, nursemaids, aunts, and mothers. Some of the youngsters were wading and screeching in glee as the waves curled and splashed about them; some were solemnly absorbed with spade and bucket. He joined a group of diggers and builders, gleefully helping them to

build sand castles, and as gleefully demolishing them in the midst of riotous mirth. But even then criticism pursued him. One boy without spade or bucket, who stood by, a mere gloomy, envious spectator, remarked caustically "Awfae cliver; but man, if I was you I' gang and get my hair cut."

Lewis turned quickly, but the boy had retreated, grinning derisively. At a safe distance he stopped, both hands outspread in a combined gesture starting from the nose. Pretending to pay no heed, Lewis dropped his play and went on, pondering on juvenile impudence that would one day blossom into ruffianly brutality.

He had walked vigorously for half an hour, a pricked vanity lending energy, and had left the crowd, clamor and rudeness far behind, when in turning a sharp corner he spied the solitary figure of a girl seated on a rock a short distance ahead. She sat very still, gazing fixedly out to sea, her hands folded in her lap. She had the attitude of one lost in reverie. He was debating whether to salute her or pass on in silence, when she turned her head, looking straight in his direction. He stopped as if shot. Katie!

A moment he stared breathless: then advanced in a smothering excitement, raising his antique straw hat. She leaped to her feet as if in alarm. A single instant she stood looking at him with wide startled eyes! then with a quick sweep of her skirts she turned and walked swiftly away.

"Cutting me dead, by jingo," he said to himself on a giddy pant.

He halted as one who is stunned by a sudden blow in the face. He had sought her, almost as a man seeks his lost soul, and lo! when he had found her she was fleeing at sight of him. He started in pursuit, all his pulses throb-

bing deliriously, and as if aware of his intention, she quickened her pace. Breaking into a stealthy run he easily overtook her.

"Katie," he panted, almost over her shoulder. "Aren't you going to speak to me?"

She wheeled, facing him with a look of questioning defiance.

"Why do you 'Katie' me?" she demanded. "Who told you my name, or what business have you to come after me here?"

Her face was very white, and there were signs that she had been crying.

Staggered and amazed out of his usual self-possession he did not immediately answer.

She broke the silence peremptorily. "Will you please tell me what you're doing here, and how you found out my name?" Look and tone said unmistakably, "So you've been spying and prying."

"This will help to explain," he answered with a quiver, and producing the photograph held it up for her to see. Her eyes seemed to start from their sockets: she gave a smothered cry of bewilderment and terror.

"Where—where did you get that?" she gasped, her voice suddenly gone hoarse. And after another pause, and still in terror and fear. "Are you going to tell me?"

"Certainly," he replied, promptly enough this time. "I will tell you the whole story—and it's worth telling. Only let us sit down in some cozy nook among the rocks."

She seemed to hesitate as in doubt. "Very well," she said curtly, and they sat down: but not in any cozy hidden nook, and she was careful to keep a clear space between them, as if measuring off the distance he was to keep.

"Now," she said, with firm lips, "I will listen."

He told her frankly with some comic details, meant to amuse, how her photograph came into his possession. The names he kept to the last. When she heard them she sat up with a cry as of sudden overwhelming pain.

"Mairet Fraser and Flora Grant. Oh! my goodness, my goodness." Then breathlessly and with stark terror in her eyes. "Did you tell them anything about me?"

"Nothing," he answered. "Not a word, not even that I ever saw you. They gave me the photograph so that I might recognize you when we met."

She drew a deep, quivering breath of relief.

"If I had told them would it matter much?" he asked.

"Only this, "she replied, striving desperately for self-control, "that if they knew I'd go out yonder," waving an arm at the sea, "and never come back."

"And if I told them now would it be the same?"

"Yes, just the same."

Trying to soothe and assure her he asked if that would not be foolish?

"That's what people would say," she agreed. "But as they wouldn't understand it wouldn't matter."

"Well, I am mum," he assured her with some emphasis. "A secret committed to me is safe."

She thanked him, adding after a momentary pause, as if to herself, "I couldn't bear it."

To his surprise her lip trembled and there were tears in her eyes. His heart melted towards her as if she were a child.

"Katie," he said softly. "I may call you Katie, mayn't I?"

"Oh! what does it matter what you call me?" she replied.

"A rose by any other name," he tried to smile. "Well!

you're Katie to me. And Katie you're in trouble. Won't you allow me to help you?"

A shudder as of sheer dread passed through her.

"No—no, I don't need help. And now I will be bidding you good-day."

She rose abruptly and he rose with her.

"Surely you're not going to run away like that," he protested warmly. "Why! we've scarcely had a minute's talk."

"I am not running away: but I must go."

"And I wanted to talk to you about a whole lot of things," he pleaded. "The Highlands, for instance. Give me a chance, Katie."

"Some other time—perhaps. Good-by."

"Then I'll see you to the station."

"No," she replied, as with the vehemence of fear. "Not on any account."

He smiled at her. "Are you afraid? Anyway you'll shake hands, and tell me when I'm to see you again."

She did not seem to hear. "Good-by," she repeated. and was gone, leaving him in a stupor of bewilderment. Had she gone crazy, or was he dreaming? Recovering with a jerk he started in pursuit: but she had vanished.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Fate sets out to be comic (or cynical) she achieves her effects with matchless cunning; but you would never suspect an innocent family picnic of being a secret instrument in her hands. Nevertheless so it was. Wholly, blindly engrossed as he sat with Katie, Lewis had no suspicion that intent, gloating eyes, were watching him from a vantage point scarcely fifty yards away. A line of bushes partially screened the watchers; but did not prevent detailed and exact observation.

A girl of the party, not yet ten, and therefore blissfully innocent of all theories of the improper, proposed to steal across and pounce on him, Indian fashion, and was peremptorily forbidden.

"Maisie," ordered her mother severely. "Sit down."

Maisie's eyes widened with wonder and disappointment. "Why Mother? Mayn't I go and play with him?"

"No," replied her mother. "You may not."

"Why?" repeated Maisie. "I often play with him. He's awfully good at making fun."

"Sit down, I tell you," said her mother, still more peremptorily. "You give me a headache with your chattering."

She glanced at her bosom friend, Mrs. Curry-Lee (the picnic was a joint affair), who glanced back to signify perfect understanding and agreement.

But when Lewis was out of sight, and the young people were encouraged to play again, so that their mothers might attend to digestion and the moral character of the community, he came up for unfettered discussion.

Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld and Mrs. Curry-Lee (hyphenated

both) were of the order of zealous, benevolent souls who generously charge themselves with the noble duty of superintending their neighbors' conduct. To that high task they gave the ardor, the energy, the lynx-eyed devotion which more selfish or less meddlesome people reserve for their own affairs. Human nature being what God in the mystery of infinite wisdom saw fit to make it, some wickedness was to be expected. To err is human, they would tell you mournfully, though happily this truth was qualified privately by a sense of flawless perfection in themselves. Hence they had no scruple in lashing the sins of others; and if they forbore to criticize the Creator they atoned for the leniency by unsparing criticism of His creatures.

Now it happened that in his comings and goings and runnings to and fro Lewis had more than once swum within their ken. They had noted his ways, conned his reputation, and to their immense regret found themselves in the position of devil's advocates. When therefore they caught him philandering with an unknown girl in a lonely spot on the seashore they really had no option but to draw their own conclusions.

"I wonder who she is," said Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld, arching an eyebrow significantly.

Mrs. Curry-Lee made an equally significant gesture with both her fat hands.

"Oh! who knows? Some light-heeled trollop he's picked up. I'm sorry for his folk. They're decent, respectable people."

"It's a sore trial, poor things," said Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld, with that Christian resignation which enables good people to bear the woes of others. "I wonder where he gets it. And the cheek of him; he has impudence enough for twenty. What do you think? The other night, I don't

know how on earth he managed it, he saw Jessie home from a party, and wasn't I furious?"

"No wonder," said Mrs. Curry-Lee, pricking up her ears expectantly.

"Oh! I couldn't tell you just how angry I was," Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld went on. "Really it was quite dreadful." She wiped her face, as if the mere memory of it sent her into an agonized sweat. "By great good luck I was by myself. If James (her husband) had been there, I don't know what would have happened."

"What did happen, dear?" asked Mrs. Curry-Lee, piously bracing herself for a shock.

"Well! to begin with I got a fright, the worst fright I've had for years. I was reading a book. It was that story where Charlotte Bronty tells about the mad wife shut up in that awful house. A terrible thing. Story-tellers shouldn't write such things, just to frighten people. Well! all at once I heard a queer rustling noise. I listened. It went on. It got louder. Then I heard smothered voices. 'Burglars,' I said to myself, 'Mercy on me! and I'm alone in the house. They may murder me.'"

"So they might," said Mrs. Curry-Lee with conviction. "Yes, dear?"

"Well! I just prayed for strength and got it. I gripped the poker, marched to the door, and without a word of warning threw it open, and there, would you believe it? in the half-lighted porch, wasn't he trying to kiss Jessie?"

"The scoundrel," cried Mrs. Curry-Lee, her tone implying that of all the affronts that can be put upon charming young womanhood, to be kissed in a half-lighted porch is the very worst. "What did you do?" she asked breathlessly. "Did you use the poker? Were you able to keep your hands off him?"

They were both large women, and the idea of physical chastisement with a windlestraw like Lewis came quite easily.

"By the grace of God I was able to keep my hands off him," replied Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld, rather priding herself on her self-control. "But I let him have it with my tongue. Oh! I can tell you I gave him a tongue-thrashing he's not likely to forget."

"What did you say?" asked Mrs. Curry-Lee who had a taste for piquant detail.

"I was that mad I can't remember just what I said," replied Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld. "But I told him for one thing he was never, never to darken my door again, and that if I caught him at any more of his tricks it would be the worse for him. I told Jessie, too, she was never on any account to speak to him again."

"Even if she meets him face to face?" Mrs. Curry-Lee visualized an interesting situation.

"Even if she meets him face to face. The poor girl was in a dreadful state."

"Oh!" observed Mrs. Curry-Lee on a significant inflection. "Better be in a dreadful state soon as syne when worse might happen. They say he has a cunning tongue in his head—for ends of his own."

"And I'm told he writes poetry," said Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld. She snorted as if the writing of poetry were the last irredeemable proof of infamy. "Poetry indeed. Loose morals, that's what it is. Think of Burns and Byron. A woman wasn't safe a minute alone with them. Not that I bother my head with their writings," she hastened to explain. "But whiles James insists on reading bits to me; I wish he wouldn't. They're too vulgar for anything."

Mrs. Curry-Lee nodded assent. "Fit for nothing but

putting bad in one's head." In her own hot romantic youth she had doted on Byron and read "Don Juan" on the sly, not without envious thrills over such a lover: but she knew better now. "Pernicious," she added incisively. "And this young man is tarred with the same stick. You do well to keep Jessie in about. He's not to be trusted."

"If ever I catch him again, there'll be ructions, that's all," said Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld, as one who means the worst. "I have my eye on him."

Poor Lewis.

The post-picnic dissection ended, a maid attended to the packing, and the party returned to the station. The children, with the maid and baskets, were put into one compartment; the ladies, desiring more room and freedom, went by themselves into another. Being economical in their pleasures they travelled third class. Already there was a single occupant, a girl, oddly huddled in a corner as if trying to escape attention. Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld and Mrs. Curry-Lee regarded her critically for a moment, and then exchanged meaning looks. The girl they had seen with Lewis. Here was an opportunity not to be missed. They would pump her.

"It's been a lovely day," remarked Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld, addressing her with a graciousness which had just the proper hint of condescension.

"Lovely," agreed the girl.

"Yes, indeed." Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld dwelt on the words as if they expressed a special dispensation of Providence. "We've just had a picnic down by the sea," she added with luring geniality. "Away from the crowd, you know. Didn't we see you there?"

"I don't know," was the curt reply.

Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld put on her most roguish, ingra-

tiating expression. "Oh yes, we saw you; and you weren't alone."

"No."

"It happens that we know the young gentleman." The word came with difficulty; but this was a diplomatic venture.

"Oh! indeed."

The girl turned and gazed with fixed determination out of the window. Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld hesitated as if at a loss, and Mrs. Curry-Lee stepped bravely into the breach.

"Poor fellow, we noticed you didn't seem very kind to him. I hope it wasn't a quarrel. Lovers' tiffs are so upsetting."

Without moving her head the girl replied. "It was not a lovers' quarrel."

Her interrogators looked at each other. "Not much to be got out of her," their eyes said. "Sulky hussy."

With fresh zest Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld took up the running.

"May I ask if you are an Edinburgh girl?" This in a tone of deep motherly interest.

"No."

"From the country, maybe?"

"Yes."

"In a situation, I suppose?"

The girl turned with a sarcastic smile. "It is very good of you to be so much interested in me and my affairs; and I like to be questioned by strangers. If there's anything more you'd like to know just ask. Would you care to see my birth certificate?"

Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld sat up very straight, her heavy pendulous face scarlet with sudden indignation. What impudence!

"Oh," she returned with a toss of her head, meant to be crushingly disdainful. "Keep your secrets. We don't want them. Very likely they're not worth having."

"I was afraid," said the girl, with the same cutting smile, "you might be too shy. Please don't stop asking. It's so friendly like—from perfect strangers."

They made the rest of the brief journey in silence, the injured and insulted ladies surging to the point of apoplexy. When alighting they turned on the offender the concentrated battery of their eyes, and if looks could kill she had been dead on the spot. She did not seem to see them. With a lithe grace impossible to their over-nourished over-developed bodies, she glided past them, and next minute was lost in the crowd. Lightly as a bird, and almost as swiftly, she flew up the Waverley Steps. Near the top a gasping voice hailed her from behind.

"By jiminy! how you climb. That's what comes of practice among the hills."

She half turned, with a look of startled inquiry.

"Oh, you!" she said, with a catch of the breath.

"Even so," smiled Lewis, breathless, but joyous. He had returned by an earlier train and for two hours had haunted the precincts of the station.

"There are friends of yours behind," she told him, in a voice quick with fear. "You mustn't be seen with me."

He laughed. "Mustn't. My dear Katie, I don't care if the whole world is glowering. Come, I'm not going to let you go this time."

CHAPTER VIII

KATIE felt that neither time nor place was at all convenient for argument. Besides Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld and Mrs. Curry-Lee were following ponderously in her wake, like a pair of dreadnaughts bringing up the rear of a battle fleet. She had no wish to encounter them again; as little did she wish to embroil Lewis. Therefore when in a half-coaxing, half-commanding tone he repeated "Come," she complied without more ado. But at a street corner a short distance down Leith Walk she stopped with the decisive air of one whose mind is made up.

"We'll say good-by here," she announced briefly.

"Good-by?" he echoed. "Come, don't rub bay-salt under my eyelids like that. Do you know that I have waited two mortal hours in the draughts and smells of Waverley Station just to catch you? And now I find you to lose you again immediately. Katie, don't be cruel."

"Not cruel," she corrected. "But—well, you just don't know what you are doing. You haven't told me your name; but I know who you are and who your people are. They'd hate and curse me if they knew."

He made a pretence of laughing derisively. Did she think he was in leading strings or had any intention of allowing himself to be put into leading strings? He meant to go his own way and choose his own friends; so unless she had more valid reasons to urge, her way was for the present his way. She shook her head resolutely.

"No, no," she answered. "Our ways are not the same at all. Please, please leave me."

Her tone was earnest, almost desperately pleading. On the other side of the street two gaudy, loud-looking

girls were laughing and nodding familiarly. She flushed crimson. They were part of her reason for summarily dismissing him. He saw: but pretended blindness, and indeed he did not care.

"Katie," he said, and his voice had the low thrill of passion. "Let me tell you something. Ever since we met you have been in my thoughts day and night. Don't imagine that's a man's fairy tale. It's as true as the breath I draw; and when I find you after much looking you drive me away as if the very sight of me were poison to you. Do you dislike me so badly as all that?"

She looked at him a moment very steadily. "It is not dislike," she answered. "Only you can't understand."

"That's a poor compliment to my intelligence," he laughed.

"It's true all the same, and it isn't any reflection on your intelligence," she returned gravely.

"I understand one thing," he said, blithely, changing tactics. "That I'm as hungry as a hawk. The seaside and a windy station give one the deuce of an appetite. And I'll bet you're hungry, too. Nothing decent to be got down there. Suppose we have something to eat?"

"Thank you, but I'm not the least bit hungry. And—I don't want to stand here. Good-by, really."

With a slight inclination of the head, too slight to be dignified by the name of bow, like a great lady decisively ending an interview, she moved off. But he was not to be dismissed like a flunkey.

"Katie," he said, promptly stepping out by her side. "Have I offended you?"

"No."

"Then what on earth is the matter? You completely puzzle me."

"Do I? Life is all a puzzle, isn't it? You see I was right in saying you couldn't understand."

"To be puzzled is to be interested," he observed sententiously. "The commonplace is never puzzling."

"Oh! Then I'd better keep you puzzled for fear of being commonplace." For the first time she smiled, sadly and wanly, as he thought, but she smiled.

"You are succeeding most admirably," he assured her. "And you're poles away from the commonplace. Some day I may understand. Meantime I repeat I'm famishing. Come, let us have tea together. Surely that's respectable enough."

He was convinced she had had nothing to eat down by the sea, and happily the trip with his father had resulted in a little extra pocket money. He could therefore afford to entertain on a modest scale.

A moment she considered. "If I have tea with you will you promise to leave me immediately afterwards?" she asked.

"If my lady insists," he replied. "Yes, certainly. Though I hope the hard condition will be relaxed."

"You'll keep your promise," she said. "That's the condition."

It was strange treatment, the last in the world he would have expected from a girl, but that merely added piquancy to the mystery.

"Very well, since my lady insists," he repeated, with the air of a Restoration gallant.

They turned into a dingy little restuarant kept by a doleful Italian who had adventured into Scotland in the romantic belief that money was to be made easily out of the swaggering, swashbuckling countrymen of the gay cavalier, Walter Scott. He had discovered his mistake,

and was trying now to save enough to take himself and his fat wife back to the sunshine, the orange groves and the fleas of Italy. In their own country Italians are a joyous folk; but north of the Tweed they decline upon ice cream, onions, east winds and the doctrines of John Knox to a state of sallow dejection: and Signor Buffini was among the most sallow and the most dejected of disillusioned fortune-seekers.

He knew Lewis as an occasional patron at festive little suppers in the back parlor, with its pictures of Genoa palms, Naples' orange groves, blue Mediterranean, Lake Como, Hadrian's Villa, St. Peter's and other dear memories of a better land. Now Lewis, entering with a young lady, a young and beautiful lady, as Signor Buffini noted, on whom he might be expected to spend money with some freedom, was received with profound respect. And Lewis, who had been to Rome and Naples, suggested to his companion a Roman dish with an impressive Italian name, to which might be added a bottle of Chianti.

"What is it?" asked Katie, who, though he never guessed it, was something of a food expert. He explained that the chief ingredient was spaghetti, but spaghetti furbished in the true Italian style. She shook her head.

"Just plain tea, please," she said.

Signor Buffini's face fell: but he executed the order with the stereotyped politeness which was part of his business. Then with a napkin tucked under his arm he stood at a discreet distance sorrowfully contemplating the too, too rigid economy of Scotland. Even Soho was better than Leith Walk.

Lewis noticed that Katie ate nothing, and rallied her on pecking like a bird. She was quiet too, with the quietness of preoccupation, perhaps of brooding misery. Once

he mentioned the Highlands, and for a moment her face lit up: then at something he said he thought she was going to cry. As a diversion he produced her photograph, and laying it on the table before him, compared it feature by feature with the original seated opposite him.

"They said it didn't do you justice," he remarked. "And they were right. It doesn't. Katie, you're twice as beautiful."

She smiled again, a wan, gray smile that went to his heart. "Poor girl," he thought. "I'm sure it isn't natural to her to smile like that."

"I wish you'd give it to me and let me tear it to bits," was all the comment she made.

Ordinarily to pass the time and get the right impression he would have fallen back on flattery. He had always found that the grand specific with the sex, though candor said distinctly that the vanity of man was far from being invulnerable. Katie was a baffling refutation of all his theories. What her thoughts were, what lay behind those dark haunting eyes he could only guess. But of this he was sure, that it would be a gross impertinence even to think of treating her to the common stock-in-trade of equivocal looks, insinuating tones, cheap inanities and insincerities meant merely to titillate pride. Insincerity was the last thing in the world to be thought of with her.

She threw him out of his reckoning. For the first time he was diffident, secretly embarrassed in the presence of a girl. Of course he was well aware what would be said and thought of her by prigs and snobs, and prudes and pharisees who were not fit to touch the hem of her garment. Let them say and think. What did he care for their evil speaking and tilted noses? He wondered again, not without a kind of awe, at the feeling she inspired in

him. It seemed to have nothing physical, though her physical beauty was entrancing. It came of something that was not body, some indefinable charm, some magic essence which, he supposed, was her essential self. Despite suggestions to the contrary he was face to face with purity incarnate. The girl of all girls in the world. Marvellous. Inexplicable.

Of a sudden he leaned across the table. "Katie," he said, and he was conscious of an uncontrollable tremor in his voice. "Katie, do you believe in love?"

She looked at him with startled eyes. The blood rushed to her face; then ebbed as quickly, leaving it white and slightly drawn.

"You mustn't talk nonsense just because I am having tea with you," she replied.

He was watching her very closely. A faint smile flitted across her face, a distressful, pathetic little smile that went to his heart like a dagger. "So young and unhappy," he thought, all his chivalrous instincts aflame.

Several questions trembled on his tongue, why she had changed, for no reason that he could guess, why she held him at arm's length, why she ran away from him by the seashore? But they would keep. *One* question, however, was burning, insistent. Again he leaned across the table, his eyes glowing, his face tensely earnest.

"Katie," he asked, his tone low and thrilling. "Do you think you could ever care for me?"

The same little flicker of a smile, tempered by dismay, crossed her face.

"Oh! I thought you were going to be sensible, and not ask silly questions," she answered.

"That question is not silly," he said, bending yet closer. "Upon my soul and honor."

Tea was over, and as if to prevent further talk she rose abruptly.

"I had no idea it was so late," she said, glancing at a clock on the wall. He stopped to pay his modest score, and she walked on. At the door he overtook her.

"Thank you very much," she said, and he glimpsed the smile which had first enchanted him. "It was very enjoyable. Good-by."

He snatched at her hand: but she evaded him.

"Like that?" he asked reproachfully.

"Your promise," she reminded him.

"You broke yours," he reminded her in turn. "Why?"

"Because I shouldn't have made it."

He made a half-smiling, shrugging protest.

"Deuced hard lines. Well! since you must run in that way, when again?"

"Oh! sometime," she answered. "It looks as if we were fated to meet. Thank you again." And with a smile she was off.

Signor Buffini sidled up just as she was disappearing round a corner.

"Da yong laidy iss in a hoory," he remarked, showing his yellow teeth in a gleam meant to be genial.

"In a devil of a hoory," responded Lewis. "S'long, Buffini. Love to the land of olives. See you again soon —perhaps."

He swung away in an altitude of feeling that was more than a little heady.

"Fated to meet," she had said. "Fated to meet."

The words sang themselves in his mind like the refrain of an enchanting song. "Fated to meet," he whistled to himself. Shy, perplexing as yet: but fated to meet. In spite of all disappointments his heart sang jubilantly.

CHAPTER IX

KATIE was not jubilant. Locked in her sordid garret —many a kennel she knew in the Highlands had more an air of home—she fought her lone, bitter fight with destiny. Lewis did not understand what lay behind her broken word, her evasion, her seeming hostility; how could he, poor boy? but she understood. It was sweet to hear him avow his love, sweet to note his accent of sincerity; but she must not listen. The silent monitor within that awes more than thunder or hurricane, emphatically warned her of that.

Her impulse was to end the battle at a stroke. A little courage, a short, sharp pain, not so bad probably as getting a tooth out, and then freedom from pain forever. Why, why not? Cleopatra and other courageous spirits had won that last triumph over evil. Was she less brave than they? No more of fortune's cruelties, no more thoughts that hurt. Peace, unbroken peace, there was the sure and certain cure for breaking hearts. What was the sense of enduring any longer? Hope! A rainbow in the morning, promising a fair day and promising falsely. Happiness! A will-o'-the-wisp luring, luring like a mirage that ever recedes and deludes, mocking the pursuer. Enough. It were folly to prolong such falsities. And yet —and yet——

Taking her head in both hands she tried to think; but her brain was on fire. In its very centre something was beating like over-driven valves: her temples were bursting, her eye-balls seemed to be red hot. Was this madness? She must not go mad, must not lose control of herself: must not. With a tremendous, concentrated effort of her

whole being she steadied herself, panting in terror. Then rising giddily she pulled up the ramshackle venetian blind.

Underneath the ground fell steeply to a narrow hollow or ravine dotted with lights. She was high up; a leap, one headlong leap down there and all would be over. She shut her eyes hard as if to ward off temptation. A full minute she stood thus, rigid as stone. When she opened them again she could see nothing but the blackness of darkness. A fresh spasm of terror shook her. Had she suddenly gone blind? She rubbed her eyes frantically and stared. Gradually the blackness faded. No, thank God, she was not blind.

Then darkly clear the country opened before her, league upon league away northward. In the near view a full, unclouded moon glistened on huddled roofs, making them gleam like silver, and, for a wonder, the winds were asleep. She threw up the sash and took a long deep breath; then another and another, gulping down the sweet air, as a parched drinker gulps cool well water. It was balm and elixir in one. Her pulses began to beat more quietly. The peaceful scene, lapped in the soft silence of night, seemed to bathe her spirit as with the coolness of dew.

She looked further afield. Yonder, under the bright northern stars were Fife and the Highlands, her Highlands. Her pulses stood still; her eyes grew moist. The Highlands! Under those stars she was born; under those stars she was loved and cherished; under those stars she had first looked forth on life, believing it, oh! her tragic innocence! believing it to be good and beautiful. And now there was—this. God help her. Trembling to the heart she turned away, sick, giddy, and afraid.

In the same moment she was startled by a violent rattling of her doorknob.

"You're wanted downstairs—quick," a girl's voice called.

"What is it?" Katie called back, holding her breath.

Again the doorknob was rattled, this time impatiently.

"What the devil's the matter?" demanded the girl outside. "Why don't you open?"

"Tell them I'm not very well and can't come," Katie answered.

There came a gurgling laugh, good humored, but unmistakably satirical.

"Hadn't I better say you're busy with your prayers? Open the door and let me in."

"Who wants me?" Katie asked, disregarding the request for admittance.

"Oh! sweet baby innocent," was the trilling reply. "Your dear old granny, of course, and she's that fidgin' fain she can hardly contain herself. Come, stir your stumps." Once more the doorknob rattled viciously, with the repeated question, "What the devil's the matter with you anyway? One would think you were hiding. He says he's an old friend of yours. If you don't look nippy someone else will go and nab him. I may do it myself."

"Do—please. I wish you would."

There was no suggestion of jesting in the tone.

"Well! I'm blessed," came from outside. "What a queer daft little thing it is, to be sure. But my dear, aren't you dreaming? This isn't a nunnery. He says he must see you. No codding."

A moment Katie considered, a hundred hot thoughts flashing through her mind.

"All right," she said then. "I'll go down and see who it is."

"He's in Number 5," she was informed. "Looks

like a Johnny with some loose change to spend. Thev're damned scarce."

It took Katie ten arduous minutes to remove the tear stains from her face, titivate, and force her spirits into some show of composure. Brightness was impossible. Feeling white and drawn she swallowed a dose of *sal volatile,* and went slowly downstairs, her mind still in a whirl. Mechanically she opened the door of Number 5, advanced a step, and halted, staring, the breath stayed in her breast.

"You here?" she gasped, her throat in such an agony of constriction she could scarcely articulate. "You—you?"

The man rose smiling, his hand held out in greeting. Instantly her hands were behind her back, and her shoulders squared defiantly. He too halted, and for half a minute they gazed silently, questioningly at each other.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded then. "Why have you come?"

He made a pretence of laughing. "As if you didn't know. You gave us all the slip so mysteriously. I've always wondered what became of you."

"And you've come ferreting to find out?"

"Yes. And upon my word I find you prettier than ever."

She took no notice of the attempted flattery.

"You might have spared me that at least," she said, breathing with a hardness that hurt.

He winced, but made a brave feint of smiling. "Surely you're glad to see me. Come, don't be unkind. You weren't that in the old days, and you don't mean it."

She made no reply. To herself she was saying. "Oh!

that I were a man to give you what you deserve, you hound, you Judas."

"How did you find me?" she asked from between set teeth.

Taking the question as an incipient sign of relenting he answered jauntily:

"I'm on holiday and thought I'd take a run here. I met a little girl and we got talking. Something she said set me thinking: I asked a few questions, quite casually, you know, got my clue and here I am."

"How clever," she observed in a tone five times embitterd with scorn. "Well! having found me what do you want?"

"Well!" he answered with resolute cheerfulness. "I thought that—that if you're not particularly engaged we might go out somewhere together. That is," he added in a tone of subduing appeal, "if you're not too angry to have anything to do with me."

"I see."

She paused as if considering: then swift as lightning she made her decision.

"Yes," she said with sudden abruptness. "That would be best. Just wait a minute."

She ran up to her dismal garret, hastily put on her hat and jacket, and studied herself a moment in the dismantled mirror, hung perilously by a cord on the wall. Then opening her box (it lacked the dignity of a trunk) she rummaged to the very bottom and fished out a Highland dagger or skene dhu, elaborately chased, felt its point with her finger; and with a quick excited movement hid it away in the bosom of her dress. That done she descended, buoyed, animated by a feeling she never hoped to experience.

"Now," she announced, popping her head inside the door of Number 5, "I am ready."

Outside her companion assumed an air of punctilious politeness, even of demonstrative chivalry.

"Where would you like to go?" he asked, and hastened to make suggestions which, he fancied, must be alluring. With a meaning look he reminded her that he had been an Edinburgh student, and knew "the old place inside out."

"Yes," she said, with grim quietness. "You used to tell me that."

"And a gay, jolly enough pleasure-ground it is, when you know your way about," he chuckled. "The saints of Edinburgh are not all so saintly under the skin. Know a thing or two, they do. Well! where and what is it to be? I am absolutely in your hands."

His tone was light and confident. She was coming round: of course she was. He knew she would. Oh! he understood the sex. It was not in womankind to withstand a man, especially a man of his superlative attractions and profound and peculiar knowledge.

"A quiet walk," answered Katie, with an odd inflection.

He was disappointed, but made a creditable show of being pleased. Lovemaking, he reflected, was like angling —to make sure of your victim you must humor her. Besides, her motive was plain as sunlight. Fo-fee-fum! Decidedly he knew the sex.

"All right," he assented, with well feigned joyousness. "Not at all a bad night for some jolly star-gazing." He laughed softly. "I know, that is to say, I used to know, just the place. They called it Lovers' Lane. Sounds all right, eh?"

"Then let us go there," said Katie briefly.

They had not far to go, being already on the edge of the country. For some distance they walked silently and quickly, Katie making the pace, as if impatient to reach their objective. Presently they were among fields and the rough stone dykes which are the solid fences of Scotland: then by an abrupt turn, beside a tiny plantation, they were in Lovers' Lane. So far as they could tell they were alone. Evidently lovers were on holiday that evening. In the utter stillness Katie could make out that her companion was breathing with some degree of excitement.

"Quiet enough, isn't it?" he remarked cooingly. "Just the place, as I said, eh?"

He made a movement as though to get his arm about her, sure she had "come round." She sprang back as from a viper.

"Don't touch me," she commanded, and it was the voice of an unknown Katie he heard, a Katie who seemed to be all tigress.

Taken utterly aback he stared at her, his jaw suddenly dropped, trying to make out the expression on her face.

"Ha, ha! a good joke," he cackled, partially recovering himself. "Oh! devilishly good."

Katie looked at him, her whole being seething with scorn.

"A joke," she repeated. "You—fool."

In its suppressed vehemence her voice seemed to make the night thrill. He swallowed something, trying ineffectually to smile.

"Pretty brutally frank," he observed. "As you're probably right, however, we won't argue the point. But what's the meaning of this little kick-up? Surely it wasn't for this sort of thing we took the trouble to come out here?"

"On my part, yes," she answered, from between clenched lips. "On your part, no. You came for something quite different I know."

He laughed, half ironically.

"But—but my dear girl——"

"Don't 'dear girl' me," she interrupted sternly. "No more of that from you. I listened to more than enough of it, fool that I was."

"Oh! going back on all that," he said, with an aggrieved air. "Can't we let bygones be bygones? Come, be sensible. Let's kiss and be friends."

Again he made a movement towards her as if to take her in his arms.

"Stop," she ordered peremptorily. "I have warned you."

He halted, pretending unspeakable amazement.

"What an absurd, furious, unreasonable little thing it is," he said, with studious blandness. "Spitting like a naughty kitten. Don't be silly. If I didn't know better I'd almost think you hated me—which wouldn't be true. Come."

Once more he made a movement towards her, this time with the plain intention of seizing her by force. She evaded him with the agility of a squirrel. He saw her pluck at her bosom; next instant there was a flash of steel in the moonlight.

"Attempt to lay a finger on me," she said, her breath coming in a fierce gust. "And as God sees me I will kill you."

He recoiled with a smothered gurgle, watching her as he might watch a tiger cat crouching for a spring. This was not the Katie he knew. She was another girl in the guise of Katie, and she was stark mad. A pretty fix for

a respectable man, with a reputation to protect. The devil take women and their outrageous tantrums. Why, in the name of common sense and human nature couldn't they be reasonable?

"Really," he protested. "Really." Then with a shrug of disgust. "Since you're taking it like that we might as well go back; but I must say I thought you'd be glad to see me."

It was her turn to laugh.

"For the sake of the happy past," she retorted. "You have a pretty sense of humor. All you had to do was to whistle and I'd run, forgetting and forgiving everything. There's no vanity, no callousness in that." She laughed again, a laugh that chilled his blood.

"But you were right so far. I am glad to see you, oh, very glad, yes, and I'm glad that we are here by ourselves, for I have one or two things to tell you."

He shrugged his shoulders with a very tolerable air of resignation.

"I didn't expect a screed of ancient history," he said. "But if it pleases you, go on. I am listening."

For half a minute she stood regarding him in a silence that thrilled and tingled with suspense. Then suddenly, like the discharge of a battery, came the words:

"You liar, you damned black-hearted liar."

He reeled as from a physical assault.

"Oh!" he said, and his hands went up as in futile self-defence. "That—that is too much. I can't, I can't listen to that sort of language."

"You can and shall," was the ruthless retort. "Now you understand why I took the trouble of coming here with you." She paused as if to note the effect of her words, and then went on:

"So you're on holiday and thought you'd just look me up and see what I had come to. Oh, but it was kind and thoughtful of you. Well! you saw. And why was I there? Because I believed and trusted you."

He made an attempt to speak: but she swept on.

"It must have amused you in the old days to find how simple and innocent and credulous I was. I was such easy game. God! how you must have chuckled. What was a girl's honor or happiness to you? You had your own ends in view. Girls are cheap, oh! dirt cheap, far, far cheaper than the whiskey you drink or the tobacco you put in your pipe. Whiskey and tobacco cost money: but any lie will do to palm off on a girl. So you thought." Once more she laughed bitterly.

"And then you were so awfully clever. You were a doctor, a doctor." She rang the words with unspeakable scorn. "Yes, a doctor and knew things. All was right and safe by your way of it. Nobody would be any the wiser. You would go in and out of decent folks' houses, and pretend and pretend, and I'd be as big a hypocrite as yourself. Were you never ashamed? Did you never feel sick at the thought of yourself?"

She was quivering: every nerve in her body was taut and vibrating: her look was a flashing of fire. If Lewis saw her then he would scarcely know her. Yet she was perfectly cool, perfectly mistress of herself. In its clear self-possessed intensity her brain seemed to be packed in ice. Her coldness was the coldness of concentrated fury, which is ten times deadlier than the red heat of anger. She saw herself as she once was, and as she was now, and the contrast kindled in her a murderous ferocity, a savage, almost irrepressible passion for actual physical vengeance. And as her rage and her courage grew, the man before her

visibly cowered. The jaunty air, the momentary flush of bravado were gone. In the pale moonlight she could see gray terror overspreading his face.

"So you are not to forgive and be friends again," he said in feeble appeal.

"Forgive and be friends again," she cried. "Never, never as long as I draw breath. And it's like your insolence to think it."

He made a spasmodic show of irritation.

"Oh well, dammit all, let us end this farce. You think you have a grievance. Is it money you want? If so it can be arranged."

She drew herself up till she seemed twice her natural height; her eyes blazed: he could see the surge and heave of her bosom in the moonlight."

"That insult too!" she said, her voice hoarse and choking with fury. "You—offer—me—money. By God! if I had the strength I'd thrash you. You deserve to be flayed alive. Money from you. My blackest curse on you. May you never know an hour's peace, sleeping or waking. That's how I value your money."

"Ah! now you have taken leave of your senses," he managed to interject.

"On the contrary," she rejoined. "I have recovered my senses. Now I know you for what you are, and that's something I wouldn't defile my tongue by saying. First you kill my happiness, do your worst to damn me body and soul, and then offer me money. Go—go—go for fear I do something to you."

He saw that she was beside herself, and knew that a woman in a frenzy is not a thing to be argued with.

"Very well," he said, precipitately agreeing, for he

had no desire whatever to prolong the interview. "After you." And he bowed low with a show of deference.

"Before me," she ordered curtly.

He bowed again, and started silently, his vanity in tatters, his spine like a trickling icicle.

Thus they returned from Lovers' Lane, he doing the goose-step half a dozen paces in front; she grimly keeping pace behind, the fingers of her right hand clenched tightly about the haft of her skene dhu. Nearing the city he stopped.

"Hadn't we better part here?" he suggested, feigning a calmness he did not feel. "Don't you think this little comedy has gone far enough?" He smiled a crooked, twisted smile.

"Go on," was the stern answer. "Go on."

"Oh! Lord," he groaned inwardly. But since it would be idle to argue with a tempest he obeyed. A few minutes later, however, he halted again.

"Isn't this pushing things too far?" he ventured, as a prisoner might look at the guard leading him to execution.

She did not answer. In the dim moonlight her face was expressionless, save for the fiercely compressed lips and the look of fixed deadly hatred. Oh! why the devil hadn't he let her alone? What idiocy had brought him back, like a moth to the flame? An infuriated woman! What might she not do? Perhaps march him straight into the arms of a policeman: perhaps make him a spectacle for a jeering mob. He blinked: his blood ran cold. A pretty fix for a respectable man cultivating a family practice in which a good name was the Alpha and Omega of success. Confound his folly.

He did not guess that she too was torn by doubt and indecision. Now that she had him cowering like a coward

she did not know what to do with him. Her tornado of fury was spent, leaving her quaking, exhausted, confused. To be sure she might be swiftly avenged. The skene dhu in her hand had shed better blood than his: but now that the surging fit of rage was over she did not want blood. Avenged! What would it benefit her? And suppose Lewis saw her? She shuddered. Not for all the vengeance in the world would she have that happen. As she was silent he plucked up courage to speak again.

"Are we to part like this. It's not what I expected. But——"

She stopped him, the blood suddenly rushing to her head.

"Go," she ordered, and he might have been a whipped hound. "Go, like the sneak, coward, and hypocrite you are."

She stood with head thrown back, one arm imperiously pointing his way, a picture of scorn, loathing, and anger that would have been a lesson to any tragedy queen.

He did not stay to comment or argue or protest. Like a baulked beast of prey he turned and slunk into the night. Could Lewis have seen or guessed he would have been proud, thrice proud of her then.

CHAPTER X

BACK in her desolation, now, as it seemed blacker, more desolate than ever, Katie sank limply on her single rickety chair, a sigh of unutterable misery heaving her breast. She had problems to solve, and one dire problem in particular, the most poignant that can confront a woman; but, unnerved and shaking, she could not face the ordeal. Her strength was gone. She had fought to the last ounce and could fight no more. Yet if she was to save herself she must act and act at once. She must escape from this awful place, this pit of pestilence into which she had been wickedly lured. But how? And supposing escape made good. What then? The prospect froze her with despair.

All at once she was startled by a sharp knock; and without waiting for an invitation a girl entered, the door being unlocked.

"Hullo! Good gracious me," was her amazed greeting. "Have you seen ten dozen ghosts? You're as white as death. And weeping too, all by your lone self. What's up?"

Instantly Katie was on her feet, brushing away the tears, with a half-furtive, half-defiant whisk.

"Nothing," she answered. "Nothing."

The girl laughed: but without any suggestion of unkindness. Indeed, as Katie was to find, her mission was the reverse of unkind.

"Needn't take the trouble of fibbing, my dear," she observed lightly. "Girls are pretty silly at times, but they're not just silly enough to break their hearts and

cry their eyes out by themselves for nothing. The usual thing, I suppose?"

With another fierce dab at her eyes Katie straightened herself as in a flash of defiance. Of her visitor she knew nothing save that she was called Nell, that she was the reputed heroine of many hectic adventures, and was much envied for her good looks and dashing devil-may-care ways.

"The usual thing," repeated Katie with a touch of scorn. "And what might that be?"

Nell smiled knowingly.

"Saints in glory but we're innocent. Suppose we call it something in trousers. That's generally the cause of a woman's trouble." Then with an amused, half-quizzical air. "How's Velvet Coat?"

Katie bridled. "You mean Mr. Stevenson, I presume?"

"La-la, of course, of course. Mis-ter Stevenson. We must mind our manners here, as the footman said when he kissed his mistress. Well then! how is Mis-ter Stevenson? There now don't blaze up like an exploding lamp. I didn't come to be nasty. I came as your friend—if you'll let me. If not give the order and I'm off. Is it to be go or stay?"

"Stay," answered Katie a trifle doubtfully.

Nell sat down on the edge of the shabby little bed.

"Come and sit beside me," she said. "There, that's more friendly like. Now," looking at Katie shrewdly. "You don't mean to tell me you've been thinking? The very worst thing you can do. What's the use of being miserable if there's any chance of being the other thing?"

"You mean it's better to forget?" said Katie, trying to get her bearings.

"A thousand million times," was the quick reply.

"Only a woman can't forget, poor thing. Oh! my God! I wish she could. Why isn't there some drug that could simply blot out the past? A woman never forgets, and when she tries hardest she succeeds least. That's her hell, and a jolly bad hell it is, too."

She shrugged her shoulders. Then looking closely into Katie's face. "Ah! you're surprised to hear *me* talk like that. Maybe I'm surprised myself. Only—well! the wearer knows best where the shoe pinches. Look here, little one, do you believe there's a hereafter, as folk say, a real heaven and a hell and all that?"

"Of course there is," replied Katie with all the intensity of conviction. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh! just because, and that's a woman's reason, isn't it? Well! I'll tell you, because if there is I may get even with somebody yet. I'd do—but never mind, let's talk of other things. You're fond of Velvet Coat, anyway he's fond of you. That's the latest. There, no bristling just because I call him what everybody else calls him. Have they told you, you must cut him?"

"Who says I must cut him?" demanded Katie, in a sudden fiery thrill of rebellion. "Who says it?"

Nell jerked a thumb to indicate regions down below.

"You know what they're after. But, my dear, if he cares for you and you care for him stick to him and tell them to go where they'll get the fairin' they deserve. By their way of it, it doesn't pay to let a girl be running round with a boy who has no money. Do you twig?"

"Oh!" said Katie, feeling as if the world were suddenly beginning to whirl.

"Don't get excited," said Nell soothingly. "I'm just mentioning it, so that you may be ready for them. They'll be telling you you mustn't waste your time with him and

I've just stepped in to give you the hint. Maybe you'd like to make a change or something. Anyway you'll be on your guard. And now, we'd better not let them catch us confabulating together. They'd be sure to smell a rat. Good-by, and tell them to go where I said."

She rose, moved quickly to the door, turned and came as quickly back.

"You're a poor, innocent babe," she said, with a look of infinite compassion. "Just a poor little lamb among wolves. I don't know what you're doing here anyway. You're not the least like the rest of us."

"Just a little more wicked," returned Katie, with a wan smile.

Nell laughed derisively. "Child you amuse me. Wicked! You don't know what the thing means. You're only in the infant class. I could teach you and never get beyond the ABC of my knowledge." She paused a moment, and then went on. "Do you know you carry my mind back to a girl I once knew very, very well. She was a good girl, and they said she was clever and pretty and everybody was fond of her. Often and often I see her in my dreams."

"Do you know where she is now or what's become of her," asked Katie.

Nell looked wistfully at her a moment before answering.

"Yes, dear, I know. God help me, I know too well."

Katie gave a gasp of horror.

"Nell," she cried. "You don't mean——"

Nell bowed her head. Then after an instant's silence. "Well! my dear, you make me think of that girl, and only last night I went off by myself and just cried my heart out as you've been doing now. But what's the use?

The lost girl will never come back, never, never. She's gone for good. And so, as the old folks say, we must just dree our weird, and grin—if we can."

Struck dumb Katie could only stare in utter amazement.

"It's not a pretty story," Nell continued. "Though God knows! it's common enough. Let it slide. But you'd never think I could once rattle off the Shorter Catechism to the delight of three watching ministers—I could almost do it now if I tried—to say nothing of long screeds of the Bible. Yes, I actually got a prize for Bible Knowledge—me. Think of that. I had all the kings and prophets and patriarchs of Israel at my fingertips, and they let me see a thing or two. David was a prize un when he got going. Poor Uriah hadn't a look in when he was about. And the beautiful Bathsheba! A divorce court beauty if you like. As for Solomon!"

She made an eloquent and meaning gesture. "I believe women were better off then than they are now. And how fine and religious they all were, just like the praying, respectable hypocrities of to-day. And that minds me. Last night I fell in with a kirk elder on his way home from a prayer-meeting. 'And what are you doing out and about by yourself, so late, sir, and you an elder?' says I. 'Toots!' says he. 'Elders are human and hae their feelin's like other folk.' The dirty old rip."

She laughed scornfully. Then bending whispered in Katie's ear, and laughed again. "Well! I must be off," she said. "Might be missed down by."

Katie's breast was heaving spasmodically.

"Nell," she said, clutching the other by the arm. "If I go away at once out of this, will you come with me?"

"And do what?" returned Nell. "Be nuns or district visitors?"

"Oh!" said Katie. "We'd settle that. Will you come?"

Nell looked hard at her. "Didn't I say you are an innocent lamb?" she replied with a half-hysterical giggle.

"Never mind that," urged Katie. "Will you come?"

Slowly and with sad emphasis Nell shook her head. "Too late, my dear, too late. Caged: lost, forever lost. I remember once reading something that ran 'Abandon hope all ye that enter here.' That's the text for me now. But you," she added with sudden energy. "Take my advice and get off quick. And look after Velvet Coat. Keep him away from—well, from birds of prey—me included. I have heard things. That's why I'm here. And as I say—go—go at once. Have you any money?" she demanded abruptly. "No use putting things up the spout. Here's my purse; take it and pay when you can."

Katie did not take the purse. Instead she threw her arms about Nell's neck, and the two held each other as for dear life.

Katie was warned just in time. Almost immediately after Nell left her she stood in the awful presence of the woman who posed to her as Destiny itself. Once already we have met the lady casually. She was big, black, masterful, impressive, and English. Why she had crossed the border northward was a matter of uncertainty. It was whispered that in England she found the police embarrassingly attentive and to evade them had flitted to the free air of Scotland. Finding the Scots hospitable she stayed, and might now be said to rank as an institution.

Recalling former experiences Katie expected to en-

counter a lowering face, and was a trifle put out to find it beaming and gracious.

"I just want to have a little talk with you," she was told pleasantly. "Please sit down."

They were in Madam's private sitting-room, a luxurious apartment usually reserved for the élite of her friends. Katie sat down gingerly on the edge of a chair, nervously wondering what was in store for her. She had never before been in this sumptuous room, and its grandeur awed her. It might be the private apartment of a duchess.

"I suppose," Madam began, leaning slightly forward and smiling effulgently. "I suppose you've been told many times that you're pretty. There—the truth is never flattery. Well! with good looks and smiles anything is possible."

"I—I don't understand," faltered Katie.

"I mean that with your attractions men, would be at your feet and competing for you. See?"

Katie stared dumbly. Taking her silence as acquiescence, Madam ran on. "You won't mind my saying so, but so far I have been just a wee bittie disappointed. Of course I make all allowances." She cooed like a sucking dove. "But I am sure now that we understand each other everything will be all right and we'll get ahead and make money. There's lots going round, you know."

"You say you are disappointed," said Katie, drawing in her breath sharply.

"The least wee bit," purred Madam. "As I say I make allowances. I hear you're in danger of becoming attached to a man who has no money. That would be a mistake. We don't want men without money, do we?"

She spoke with the insinuating smoothness of the

serpent when he tempted Eve, eyes and manner a caressing softness.

Katie was breathing very hard.

"You mean——?" she began.

"I mean," put in Madam, "the fellow they call Velvet Coat. Cut him: he's no sweetheart for you."

A sudden fiery thrill passed through Katie.

"Please leave his name out of it," she said. "He's not here to speak for himself."

Madam gazed at her a full half minute as if to ask: Why! what on earth's the meaning of this? "Surely you're not going to tell me—but no, it would be too absurd," she gurgled engagingly.

Katie flushed a blazing red: but made no reply. Her lips were clenched; her heart was beating as if it would break its bounds. "It has come," she thought, and gave her courage a determined hitch-up.

"Now you really mustn't be ridiculous," pursued Madam, still in the tone of the beneficent patroness. "Why should you waste your time on a man who hasn't a sixpence? I may tell you I have already forbidden him the house."

Katie rose abruptly, her eyes flashing.

"Then," she said decisively. "You must forbid me the house too."

Madam affected to be amused. "Come, come, don't be silly," she said coaxingly. "In the beginning girls are so romantic. But you'll get over it. We all do. It doesn't pay."

Katie made no reply, though her grim, set face was reply enough.

"I'm trying to advise you in your own interest," Madam continued with unruffled smoothness. "Has the

fellow been trying to make you believe he loves you? Much his love is worth." She tittered scornfully.

"I'd rather not discuss him," answered Katie with stubborn defiance.

Madam's face darkened suddenly.

"Oh! that's the way of it, is it? So like a girl who doesn't know better. Well! I'm giving you your chance. Throw it away if you like. Only remember what I once told you. We can't have any foolishness, you know."

The smooth manner was going; the serpent was just hinting that it had fangs.

"I remember perfectly," said Katie with compressed lips. She thought of Lewis and a nameless sensation flamed along her veins like living fire. Whatever happened she would brook no word against him.

"Well!" said Madam, and now the voice was hard as the voice of Fate. "It comes to this that I can't and won't have my girls playing the fool where there's no money. You understand that?"

Katie's shoulders went back with a jerk. She had found her courage.

"Perfectly," she replied. "And now I have something to say. When you sent for me I was on the point of coming to tell you that I am going, that I refuse to stay or have anything to do with you."

Madam drew back her lips tightly, viciously: the serpent was baring its fangs.

"Going?" she cried. "Going? We'll see about that, my lady. Since coming here you have done nothing but mope and mope and mope. It won't do."

"That," retorted Katie, seeming to grow an inch in stature, "is my busines not yours."

Madam stared a moment as if finding this impudence,

this presumption incredible. Then she rose, her face black as a thunder cloud.

"Not my business, eh?" she cried. "Oh! isn't it? I have lost money on you: but I put up with your nonsense, thinking you'd get over it. Now I have to tell you this—that you'll earn or refund what I have spent on you before you set foot outside this house. Is that plain enough for you?"

"Quite plain," rejoined Katie, with the cold anger which is as tempered steel. "Now let me speak with equal plainness. As you very well know I came here by a trick. Ever since coming I have kept myself to myself. Attempt to interfere with me or prevent me from going, and the police will settle matters. Is that plain enough?"

"You—you impertinent, ungrateful hussy," spluttered Madam almost in convulsions. "I'll teach you. You're going when I let you. Make up your mind to that."

She moved forward as if to guard the door.

"Stop," commanded Katie imperiously, rising, as it seemed, to twice her natural height. "Stand back. I have told you what will happen if you try to prevent me from going."

There was a furious, beating pause, both women holding their breath. Then without another word Katie swept out of the room, shutting the door with a bang behind her.

Twenty minutes later she stood beside her box on the pavement, with all the world before her and not a spot she could call Home.

CHAPTER XI

ONCE again Fate, the master dramaturge, was indulging her insatiable love of satire. In the very moment when Katie stood on the alien pavement, hapless and homeless, Lewis was shut up in his own room, giddily inditing a poem in her honor. Displeased with the first essay he had torn it into fragments (altered and revised out of recognition) and started anew. Perfect herself, Katie must have perfection in song from her poet-lover. Accordingly the new gem was to outshine Catullus and Burns and all other renowned practitioners in the high erotic art.

But alas! though passion seethed like a caldron in his breast, somehow it still refused to flow freely and limpidly from his pen. He tore his hair over the maddening recalcitrancy of words, the artist being almost as much galled as the lover. He flattered himself on possessing a pretty taste in words, and was proud, pardonably proud, of his skill in using them. Now he fumbled abominably. Language, which should be as molten gold in the poet's alembic, fluid and gleaming, was stiff, obstinate, crabbed, crooked, inexpressive, uninspired, a mere blurring and smothering of the divine fires within.

"Hopeless botching," a critical sprite taunted. "Imitative hi'-falutin' fustian that any fifth-rate rhymester might produce in a fit of D.T's. Chuck it."

In a mental sweat he paused, painfully nibbling his pen. Ah! the trouble was that he was too hot, too keen, surged and seethed too much. Poets, come to think of it, rarely wrote of love in the midst of its fiery ecstasies. They did that later when the muse was a little more her-

self, had better command of her material. He would wait till his pulses beat more equably, if ever they were likely to be equable again. He almost hoped not. For, like the lover's pinch that hurts and is desired, this absorbing, baffling fever was delicious.

Meantime to regain control of himself, he would take a turn out of doors. Nothing like a brisk walk to help the brain and quicken the artistic faculty. Thrusting the unfinished lyric into his pocket he sprang up, almost upsetting his chair. Then taking his bearings as cunningly, as cautiously as a scout in touch with the enemy, and finding the coast clear, he stole out of the house, by good fortune evading everybody.

Night had fallen, clear and starry. "A fine clear night of stars," he murmured, coining a phrase that pleased the esthetic sense. The world reposed in a profound hush. Edinburgh in the soft night, one of the rare still nights, and the more impressive because of its rarity, with the quiet heavens above, an infinitude of peace.

Still vibrating poetically he halted, gazing raptly upwards. Amid the fumes and blasphemies of the tavern he had, as he was often bitterly reminded, roused obscene laughter and applause by a blatant parade of atheism. As he looked into that stellar splendor the still small voice that is not heard in taverns, whispered Napoleon's pregnant question, "Who made all that?" In presence of that glory, that majesty he stood rebuked, yet with a strange thrilling sense of exaltation.

"You pretend to be a poet," something seemed to say. "Behold then the poetry of the spheres in the autograph of the greatest of creative authors. Match it if you can."

He felt the magic of the stars, the everlasting stars!

the patent sign-manual of the eternal? Job had looked into the starry heavens with awe and trembling. So had David and Isaiah. The gorgeous Syrian stars had looked down on Jesus Christ. Shakespeare had marked the majestical roof fretted with golden fire. Mute nameless poets and sages had beheld the wondrous spectacle in adoration. And there it all was, set in the boundless translucency of night; and beyond and beyond, endlessly beyond—till the awed, faltering imagination stood dumbfounded.

Half dizzy he lowered his eyes. The craggy heights of the Old Town twinkled in friendly familiarity from the windows of their towering "lands." Here and there a church steeple rose dimly, like an enormous needle piercing the night: and westward, on the cliff edge, the grim time-scarred Castle, guardian of the ages, stood fast. Picturesque! Oh, yes, Auld Reekie was picturesque. His own, his romantic town, she that gave him birth, whose child he was, however he might rail against her spirit and her judgments. He loved her, hated her, despised her, was proud of her. And who knew? One day in the far, far future she might be proud of him, all offences pardoned or forgotten. The love and admiration of his own people. *That* too was an ideal to inspire.

He let his eyes rest again on the jagged, zigzag line of lights. Up there jovial blades were making themselves glad with the wine of life; up there also sneaks were furtively taking their stolen pleasure, like foxes in the murk, godly debauchees who slobbered religion, oozed vice and calumniated their neighbors and betters. He was not vindictive, but he rather hoped it was true that for all such a particularly hot spot was reserved.

Up there he had met *her*. It seemed incredible she should ever have been there. What took her there? What

but destiny. She had gone to meet him. Had she not said, "We are fated to meet?"

He continued his course eastward with no very clear idea of destination. For he had little hope of meeting Katie. From open windows beauties of the night flaunted their painted charms, blew kisses, called endearing names: others who made the air pungent with rank perfumes, saluted him brazenly and familiarly in the street. He flung them jesting replies and strode on, past the Register House, a landmark in his courses, and downward into Leith Street. Then, as if his feet took their way by instinct, he turned sharply round a corner into a street that ran steeply down into a hollow in the shadow of the Calton Hill. At the head of a dark, malodorous little alley, a close-mouth, in the local vernacular, he paused, listening. With clenched jaws and determined aspect he walked on as if putting Satan behind him.

"Not to-night," he said to himself. "Not to-night."

Fifty yards off he halted, considered a moment, eyes on ground, and swung back. Again at the close-mouth he paused, listening, this time more intently. A sound of revelry, familiar and enticing, floated upon his ear. A lusty chorus was chanting:

> A fig for those by law protected,
> Liberty's a glorious feast:
> Courts for cowards were erected,
> Churches built to please the priest.

Tempting, very tempting: but—not to-night.

Virtuously resolved he walked swiftly on, halted once more at the end of thirty paces, stood a moment; then wheeled and returned. Why not? No need to be a puritan. It was a sign, a test of manhood to enjoy oneself ration-

ally. He was lonely: he needed solace. In there was good-fellowship. Besides——

Turning in with a quick jerk as if to overcome opposition, he took a dozen long strides, disappeared through a door half-way down, and passed along a flagged, dimly lighted passage. At the far end was a door and in the door a small circular window screened by an overhanging flap. As he advanced the flap was hurriedly drawn aside and a pair of keen, questioning eyes peered out. It was necessary to be careful, for the Law sometimes stole in with impertinent intentions which more than once ended in the police court. Instantly the flap dropped and the door opened to its utmost width. No danger with Lewis: he was one of themselves.

As in Bolem's tavern he was received with shouts of "Velvet Coat, Velvet Coat, hooray for Velvet Coat." Glancing quickly round as if expecting to see someone, he grinned broadly, and squeezed into a crowded seat.

"Very nearly sat down on my lap," giggled a large, high-bosomed girl with a broad face, a husky voice, drowsy eyes, and an overmoist mouth. "Should be t' other way about, shouldn't it, Velvet Coat? How would you like to nurse me, dearie?"

He curled up his long legs, which doubled as if fitted with hinges, twisted his thin claw-like hands and smirked.

"I'm not a Hercules," he answered. "But I'm game to take on the job."

The company guffawed hilariously; it was a neat dig at size. With unruffled good nature the husky Amazon bent over and patted his head maternally.

"Nice boy for all its impidence," she beamed. "But lil boy needs a hair cut. This," toying with his locks, as

with a child's ringlets, "makes him look too much like a lassie."

"Havers," cried a second girl on the other side. "D'ye no ken he's a poet? How could he write poetry with short hair?" She was the girl who had sarcastically offered to treat him in Bolem's tavern.

Intervening politely in the beaten way of business, the proprietor bowed for orders. He was a Frenchman with a short, broad, flabby body, a close-cropped, grizzled head, a wheezy gurgle that did duty for a laugh, a crafty eye and unlimited sympathy with the gay aspirations of youth. He believed in gayety for "young beoble" on a strictly commercial basis, but complained of having his sympathies cramped and chilled. Scotland was *magnifique,* oh, *oui, magnifique, mais la belle France elle sait mieux s'amuser.* No offence, but really and truly they did those things better in France, in the Latin Quarter, out by Montmartre.

France understood the art of pleasure: Scotland worried about its soul. Ach yes, no fun in worrying about one's soul. And the police! Vairy noble: vairy streect. And queer people called unco guid. Vairy inquisitive, vairy troublesome.

"Beoble are vairy foony," he would chuckle. "De fooniest tings in the world are joost beoble. Vel, vel, I know vot I know: but I veel nod spleet."

Lewis, who often cracked Parisian jokes with him in his native tongue and liked to have others in return, was an especial favorite.

That night the company was as free and promiscuous as the jolliest heart could desire. Ladies whose only blushes were borrowed from the paint box: young bloods "about town"; budding limbs of the law, future judges

who would one day strike terror into evil-doers with one awful look from the judgment seat; embryonic medicos prematurely versed in the underside of human nature, coming elders, merchants, the flower of coming citizens having a fling before settling down to usefulness and respectability. There was also a picturesque sprinkling of the military element.

This last included a captain from the Castle and a naval lieutenant whose ship lay quietly almost within bowshot of the Hawes Inn, Queensferry. Years before the two had met on Empire business among primitive people ten thousand miles away: that afternoon they met in Princes Street with Empire left out, and after a club-dinner were taking their pleasure in a night-club as guests of a distinguished blood.

Still excited and sensitive Lewis found them true blue *hèros de roman*. The captain, after a look at some of the far-flung outposts of the British Empire, had enjoyed active service on the Afghan frontier (scar, medal and clasp), and followed in the trail of great men, Colin Campbell, Outram, Havelock and others: heroes and famous fighters all. The lieutenant had seen more lands than Cook or Columbus ever dreamed of, and had taken part in shindies in far off places which were scarcely names on a map. He had been on the China Station, in Australia, in the South Seas and taken a passing look at Africa. Here was cosmopolitanism of the most entrancing kind.

Each of the heroes was soon the centre of an admiring, applauding group. By chance Lewis was attached to the naval lieutenant, and was speedily lost to all thought of time and duty. The China Station did not greatly interest him (already he had supped royally there): he

seemed to care little for Australia or Africa; but the South Seas were unalloyed fascination. Where in those realms of magic had the lieutenant been? Lightly, indifferently, as if reporting an incident in a deck parade, he mentioned Honolulu, Tahiti, Samoa. Lewis's imagination leaped at the mere sound of the words. He felt the heat of the tropics, smelled their musk, beheld their flowers, their corals, their surf, their swarming brown populations.

"And you had fighting, hadn't you?" someone asked.

"Oh! a little blow up here and there just to keep our hand in," smiled the lieutenant. "In one place a misguided king got swelled head and thought he'd do a war dance—as a demonstration. 'Spect he fancied himself dining on us."

"What happened?" asked a girl.

The Lieutenant smiled. "Why! what should happen? We just stood off a bit and blew the whole jing-bang to smithereens. British shells rather impressed that little lot. You should have seen King Cofoozolum doing obeisance in desperate haste and a gorgeous loin cloth. Poor chap, he was rather fat and unwieldy; but he got through with it. Kissed the British flag, vowing it was the finest bit of bunting he had ever seen. Nothing like a little target practice for teaching niggers manners."

He spoke familiarly of rubbing shoulders with royalties who ate their enemies, of feasting in kings' houses and making love to kings' daughters. "Not half bad looking some of 'em," he remarked reminiscently.

"And how do the people dress?" a girl asked. "What do the women wear?"

"Oh! mostly just a smile," he answered. "No need for anything else."

"My word," she cried. "Just a smile. It sounds

like Eve in the Garden of Eden. Wouldn't do for this climate. Did you like them, Ducky? You said they were rather pretty, didn't you?"

"Ripping," was the answer.

"Think of that, and them savages. Of course you went and made love to them?"

He grinned. "I rather think I have a wife somewhere out there now."

"A wife? Maybe a princess?"

He grinned again. "Oh! you wicked young devil leading nice good girls astray." This in a tone of adoration from the sarcastic girl. "How lovely it would be to be out there, with nothing on but a smile and maybe a flower in one's hair. Are the men good looking?"

"Champion, lots of 'em. Hot stuff, too."

"Goo," cried the girl. "I'll emigrate at once. Will you take me? I could be packed away anywhere, and I'd never say squeak till we got there."

"Ay," drawled a male listener. "But yer man micht eat ye."

"And wouldn't that be a sure sign that he liked me?" she retorted. "Not like the men here who won't say boo for fear it costs them something. I think I could do with a fine big brown buck of a savage." She laughed, the company laughing with her. "Well," she added on a change of tone. "This may be pleasure: but it isn't business, as the fox said, to the cackling hen, let's be getting along."

She rose, studied herself critically in a small mirror, gave her hat a jauntier tilt, dabbed at her frizzled hair and shook out her cheap gaudy jewellery. That done she remarked at large. "The night's dark. Who's going to see a lonely lassie home?"

Lewis sat on gloriously oblivious till, Mossoo, so he was styled in compliment to his nation, intimated with profound regret that under a tyrannous law he was obliged to shut his hospitable door for the night. The parting with the lieutenant was tender if slightly incoherent. Some day Lewis assured him, they must meet in those far off enchanted regions where Eden still survived, and then hey! for the beauties clothed in a smile. The lieutenant cordially hoped so, adding he was sure his new friend would mightily enjoy the experience. There were no Ten Commandments out there.

On reaching home Lewis let himself in with all the caution and circumspection of a sober, industrious citizen obliged to be late at business. He hoped to pass to his room unnoticed: but in the hall a stout female figure confronted him with a reproachful stare. Frowning inwardly he affected an eager gladness.

"Hullo, Cummy," he said, with just the suggestion of a hiccough. "Losing your beauty sleep like this. It's very unwise."

Cummy drew a step closer, sniffed, and held up a warning finger.

"Lewis, my lamb," she said in a low voice. "Dinna be lettin' yer father catch ye wi' a breeth like that. Up to your bed, quick."

"Is he on the rampage again?" queried Lewis, grinning queerly. "Another prayer meeting? They're getting——"

"S' sh," said Cummy, taking him by the shoulders and pushing him gently but firmly toward the staircase. "There run awa and dinna be fashin' wi' questions. Do as I'm tellin' ye."

He obeyed without explanations, slipping upstairs with the silence, if not the celerity, of a cat.

"Hell!" he said to himself as he shut his door. "In for it again. This is becoming——"

He stumbled and sat down suddenly on the edge of his bed. Then he laughed. It was all damn funny. What a damn funny upside down thing life was anyway.

In five minutes he had forgotten Cummy and her warning. And when he fell asleep it was on delectable visions of palm groves, silver seas, and plump much undressed maidens, with brown polished skins and seductive eyes, smiling alluringly from thickets of gorgeous flowers. It was a rapturous sight even for a dream. Then suddenly in the very midst of the picture there appeared a face that was not brown, but wan and sad, and eyes that did not smile but were strangely, irresistibly appealing. With a smothered cry he turned in his sleep, and held out both hands in a swelling, choking throb of yearning and pity. There—there was the rose on the fair forehead of innocent love. Katie! Next minute he sat up wide awake, as if to fold her in his arms. But she was gone.

CHAPTER XII

LEWIS woke next morning to find his mother by his bedside with a breakfast tray. Bending quickly she kissed him as only a mother kisses. She was tall, fair, smooth-featured and still surprisingly young, with a soft soothing voice, and a natural winsomeness of manner that easily won hearts.

"I thought you'd be tired, dear, so I just brought it," she explained smilingly. "Have you slept well?"

"Oh! so so," he replied, with a half-suppressed yawn. "Dreaming a bit," he added, wondering what she would say if she knew the nature of his dreams.

"Oh! you dreamer, you dreamer," she responded. "Asleep or awake you're always at it."

She placed a pillow on his knees and set the tray on it, not an elegant table, but handy.

"Oh! I sometimes work, Mother," he laughed. "When I have time, like the Cambridge undergraduate."

"Dreaming is working with you, dear," she observed seriously. "That's what I meant. You never give your brain a rest. You keep too close at this writing. It's making you pale."

"'Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,'" quoted Lewis. "Never mind, one of these days you'll find me as red faced as a publican or a pork butcher."

"That'll be a change. There then, have your breakfast and don't let it get cold. You see I remembered you like kidney with your bacon; and here are your cigarettes."

"Oh! you jewel of a mother," he cried. "You're always trumps."

Stroking his hair she smiled down at him: then stooping kissed him again even more fondly than before.

"If you want anything just ring," she said. "Now I must be off and get my own breakfast."

She went asking no questions, though there were many in her heart. But a few minutes later she had some private and confidential talk with Cummy, and then she asked very tentatively, as though the subject were dangerous:

"Do you know if Lou was late in coming in last night?"

"Ay," was the blunt answer. "He was late in comin' in. I waited up for him."

"Your goodness is unending, Cummy," said his mother. "Was he what you'd call—was he all right?"

"Perfekly all right," replied Cummy, with what might seem excessive emphasis. "Siccan a question, mistress."

"Of course, of course," agreed his mother, breathing rather quickly. "Only you know, Cummy—well! his father gets worried when he's out late. You won't say anything about it?"

"Is it like I'd do sic a thing?" demanded Cummy. "Na, na that's no me, I'm gled to say, that's no Cummy." She spoke the full-flavored speech of Fife in all its accentual richness.

"You've always been an angel to Lou," said his mother feelingly.

"Giff-gaff," retorted Cummy promptly. "He's always been an angel to me."

"Oh! he loves you for your goodness," said his mother, with a thrill of gratitude in her voice. "So do we all. Hasn't he called you his second mother?"

Cummy threw back her head with a resounding guffaw. "And his first wife," she cried. "An auld done runt o' a thing like me. Weel! I'm tellin' ye this, mistress, if I was the lassie I once was it's no whisperin' in deef ears he'd hae to be."

Smiling softly his mother regarded her with tender, searching eyes. "What would you do, Cummy?"

"Do," echoed Cummy. "What does a lassie do when her heart's nae langer her ain? Umph! I'd just be as daft as the lave. When love comes in at the door sense flees oot o' the window. It aye was so, it aye will be so, as lang as folks is folks."

"Oh! you're partial, Cummy, you're partial," protested his mother, her eyes shining with gratification. They were brown eyes; the eyes of Lewis.

"Partial here, partial there," rejoined Cummy. "It's true what I'm tellin' ye. And what for no'? Hae I no' good reason to be partial? Isn't he my bairn amaist as much as yours? Hae I no tendit him when he couldn't tend himsel? Has he no toddled hingin' on, first to my finger and then to my apron string? Hae I no done for him till—till he's part o' mysel and the best part too?"

"Yes," said his mother.

"Oh! the ploys him and me's had thegither," cried Cummy. "My heart juist goes dunt, dunt at the thought o't."

"Many and many's the weary night you watched over him, Cummy," said his mother, her eyes moist.

"Weary," replied Cummy. "Did ye say weary, mistress? I never wearit wi' him in my life. He's aye been owre good company for that. Nobody kens the times him and me's had. Whiles it was 'kiss me, Cummy,' then it was 'read to me, Cummy,' and I read, what didn't I

read? Daft and wise a' mixed up like plums in a puddin'. And when he was tired o' books I telt him a' the bogle stories I kent and some I didna ken, but just made up oot o' my ain head. And when the story-tellin' was done I would lift him in my airms, whiles happit in a blanket, whiles, truth to tell, in my auld red petticoat, to let him see the braw world outside, and he just loupit wi' joy. Many and many's the time him and me's seen the sun risin' thegither. And I can hear yet how he used to say 'bonnie, bonnie,' and, 'Did God make all that? How clever God must be.' Weary. It would be my ain faut if I wearit wi' him."

She drew a hand furtively across her eyes.

"And then his queer, wee elfin ways. Says he to me once. 'Cummy, did you ever see your own name in print?' 'No,' says I, 'that I mind o'. They dinna put poor folks name in print except when they're sendin' them to jyle, and the Lord save me from that.' 'Well,' says he, 'Some day I'm going to write a book, Cummy, with pictirs and things, and I'll put your name in it. Think o' that.' 'Ay,' says I, 'And make folk laugh at me.' That was how we carried on. Weary! I never kent what wearyin' meant."

"If it wasn't for your care, your constant and loving care, I don't think he'd be alive to-day," his mother observed, a soft tremor in her voice.

"Havers," retorted Cummy. "Havers. They live that's meant to live and dee that's meant to dee. His time hadna come, and lang, lang may it be in comin'," she added fervently. "The Almighty has work for him to do or I'm mista'en."

For a moment his mother was silent; then very slowly she said:

"Some say he's not doing much of the Almighty's work now, Cummy. You know the stories that are going round."

Cummy tossed her head scornfully. "I never fash wi' clypin', claverin' tongues," she remarked. "That's deil's wark for deil's bairns. And if ye ask me, mistress, it's no very becomin' in them that live in glass houses to be throwin' stones. As for stories, 'deed I hae something better to do than listen to the yammerin' o' spitefu' fools Wise folk see to their ain dish cloots."

And she stalked away in starched, contemptuous majesty. Criticism of her charge was a personal affront to be resented as such.

That day after his leisurely breakfast and half a dozen cigarettes, Lewis condescended, purely for form's sake, to look in at the University; then, down a back close he lunched royally with Charlie and another on saveloys and mulled porter. Those engagements over he returned early to compose an article on "Umbrellas" (stunning, sir, and full of startling philosophy) for the College magazine he edited. His father was absent on a professional mission in the country; his mother was out attending to social duties; Cummy was *locum tenens*. He congratulated himself on the prospect of a free run with the muses and the opportunity of presenting umbrellas as symbols of a degenerate civilization, when his door opened and Cummy walked in, carrying in her hand a bulky envelope.

"This has just come," she said. "So I brought it at once, thinking you'd maybe want to have it."

He ripped the envelope open, stared a second and jumped to his feet.

"Damn!" he cried viciously, and again, "Damn!"

"What's the damnin' for dearie?" asked Cummy, feigning a surprise she did not feel.

"A returned manuscript," he answered disgustedly. "It is my misfortune to have some traffic with fools and idiots. I don't know what I've done to deserve it."

"They're sair cattle," commented Cummy. "I have heard say that all things are possible except to learn a fool sense."

"The gods themselves are powerless against stupidity," said Lewis, tossing the rejected contribution among the litter of papers on his table. "And the Cockney variety is as bad as the home grown—almost. Don't you take to writing, Cummy; it's heartbreaking."

Cummy smiled calmly. "Am no' likely. I'll break my heart some other way. There's nae end o' ways." She paused, looking at him curiously. "Are ye extraornar busy?" she asked then.

"Never too busy for you, Cummy," he answered, well knowing she itched to tell him something. "Here," setting a chair; "sit down and give us your crack. It'll warm me up after that cold douche. Anything new?"

She seated herself, keeping a very stiff and upright attitude.

"I was at the prayer-meetin' last night," she announced enigmatically.

"And I wasn't," Lewis laughed, with a vision of the night before. "Cummy, do you think it's possible to get salvation by proxy?"

"No," replied Cummy. "Ilka herrin' hangs by it's ain head there."

"I was hoping I might slip in hanging on to your skirt, Cummy. God knows I have done it often enough—hung on to your skirt, I mean. But Peter's an alert old

gentleman, they say. Well was the prayer-meeting very, very edifying?"

"Unco edifyin'," answered Cummy. "If we dinna repent it's no for want o' hearin' aboot our sins. Your friends Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld and Mrs. Curry-Lee were there."

"For God's sake call them not friends of mine," he protested. "But I'm glad to hear they're attending to their souls; for between you and me and the cat, Cummy, I fear their bodies are beyond redemption."

"It's other folks' souls they're troublin' about," said Cummy grimly. "After the meetin' I had 'how d'ye do' from them. They speired for you too and mentioned they saw you danderin' doon by the seaside."

"Oh!" said Lewis, genuinely surprised. "I didn't see them."

"No, they said ye were owre thrang wi' your company for that. They asked me if I kent the lassie."

"What the devil's business was it of theirs?" cried Lewis in sudden indignation.

"I didna fash askin' them," was the answer.

"Well! and what did you tell them?"

"Oh!" replied Cummy. "That I ken the lassie fine, and that she's one o' the best and bonniest steppin' on shoe leather this day. And if they wanted mair information I was aye ready to be obligin'. The Lord forgive me for leein'. It was sinfu'—just after a prayer-meetin' too."

"But you told the truth," Lewis declared, vehemently. "You told the absolute truth. What else did they say?"

"Oh that they hoped I was right and a' that; but it wasna just becomin' to be trapezin' there in a lonely place wi' a lass a' by yer lone selves."

Lewis began to pace the floor. "They did, eh? That's

thrilling. Maybe they'd like to lock up my morals in a tin box and keep the key. Were the dears embarrassed? Did they see anything to shock their chaste minds?"

"They're unco clever," replied Cummy. "What they dinna see they just jalouse, and what they jalouse they're sure o'. It's as good as seein'."

"A whole School for Scandal in themselves," said Lewis bitterly. "Cummy, some people ought to be soused in a cesspool. They'd be in their native element. I'm sorry they didn't get anything dirty to carry away. If I had known I'd have done my best not to disappoint them. But you were right, Cummy, as you always are."

"It was very wicked," returned Cummy, not without a secret relish of her own iniquity. "But was I to hae them clypin' and sniffin' and lookin' this and that and yon and the other thing and never say boo? Whiles we sin wi' our eyes open. I suppose it's then the Deil gets a haud o' us. But they got up my dander wi' their 'Thank the Lord we're no like other folk' airs. So I just did what I did. But I was a wee bittie feared too, dearie. Who's the lassie, Lewis?"

"A Highland girl who happens to be here at present," he answered promptly. Then regarding her with an intent look. "Cummy, will you keep a secret?"

"I'll try," answered Cummy. "I've keepit a few in my time."

"Well! then look here. What do you think of that?"

"Oh! her photygraph nae less," observed Cummy, valiantly dissembling the intensity of her interest. "You're gettin' on, you're gettin' on. My faith!"

She examined the photograph slowly, critically, turning it this way and that way to try it in different lights.

"Bonnie," she commented at last. "I was right sae far."

"You were right all the way through," declared Lewis, with quite unnecessary emphasis. "If ever beauty and goodness——"

"They say beauty and goodness seldom go hand in hand," she interrupted.

"Look at that face," cried Lewis impatiently. "What does it tell you? What does it mirror? Why, Marlowe might have been dreaming of it when he sang of the face that launched a thousand ships."

"A face launchin' a thousand ships," retorted Cummy. "Gae awa wi' ye. A face that launched a thousand ships. Dinna try to make a fool o' an auld wife just because she's daft enough whiles to believe what ye tell her."

"It's gospel truth," he assured her ardently. "Look at that face again. Doesn't goodness shine from it as light shines from the sun?"

"I suppose that's what ye ca' poetry," smiled Cummy. "There's a sayin' that handsome is as handsome does. Is she the kind o' girl you'd bring to see your mother?"

"She's the kind of girl I'd bring to see the Angel Gabriel," answered Lewis grandly.

"Never heard *he* was a judge o' the lasses," observed Cummy with mock gravity. "Solomon would be mair to the point." She handed him back the photograph. "It's a comfort to find I wasna leein' so terrible bad after a'."

She smoothed out her dress in a preoccupied manner. Then looking up she asked as it were casually:

"Were you seein' her last night?"

"No," answered Lewis promptly. "I wasn't, more's

the pity. And that reminds me, Cummy, was I—well! a trifle elevated when I came in?"

Cummy smoothed down a wrinkle in her skirt.

"Ye were by or'nary circumspect."

"Which means, my dear Cummy?"

"Oh! just that ye were a wee thocht in the wind. Am no' sayin' a man should never hae a dram. I suppose drink is made for drinkin'. But the lasses—Lewis, my dear, be careful."

She rose, shaking out her stiff skirt. "Well, I maun be runnin'. I'll be seein' yer friends Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld and Mrs. Curry-Lee. Any message for them?"

"A very special and particular message," he replied. "My compliments and tell them to go to——"

"Hush, hush," she interrupted, with uplifted forefinger. "Dinna be profane. Wha kens? maybe they're on their way there now."

At the door she turned as one who suddenly remembers something important.

"You've forgot to tell me her name," she said.

"That's a titbit for another time," he laughed. "Bad plan to eat all one's cake at once."

"Oh! weel, weel, maybe the cake will keep," responded Cummy with a knowing look. "And mind what I said about bein' careful."

Lewis sat down doggedly to "Umbrellas," for the printer was waiting, wrote a sentence, scored it out savagely, wrote another, again scored more viciously than before, and stopped like an engine with a burst boiler. Inspiration was gone: all his airy Heinesque fancies, that were to herald the advent of a new genius and tickle a select world of readers, had evaporated. His mind felt like a rusty machine choked with chaff. Oh! damn! Idle

to grind out stale mouldy stuff under the delusion that it was sweet golden grain. He wondered how journalists fetched up their drivel to time. Did they cough it up or did it ooze mechanically from journalistic fingertips?

He threw down his pen, flung the mangled "Umbrellas" at the returned manuscript with an oath of disgust, rolled and lit a cigarette. Then on the troubled horizon of his mind loomed the prodigious figures of Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld and Mrs. Curry-Lee. So those puffing, canting porpoises had been spying on him and concocting scandal. Just what they would do, of course. Spreading slander in the name of religion, hoping to merit heaven by making earth a hell. A noble ideal. Well! they were safe—for they were no temptation.

His thoughts travelled back to the little incident of the porch. So far as he could remember, Jessie had shown no sign or symptom of shock till her blustering termagant of a mother came on the scene. Worse girls than Jessie, by Jove! Plenty of warm human nature in that plump, pulsating body of hers. That night her eyes were a challenge. "Dare to kiss me," they said; and he dared. Then like a miniature tornado her stampeding mother tore out and the sweet little comedy ended in a wild explosion.

He chuckled at the recollection. How amusing a woman in a holy fury of respectability could be. And Jessie was forbidden to speak to him. How interesting the next time they met. Meanwhile, in yet another rousing spasm of defiance, he threw down the gauntlet to all moral detectives. Since they were so hot in nosing for prurient sensation he would do his best to gratify them. From the comedian's point of view it was all great fun, besides being most gloriously exciting.

CHAPTER XIII

YET other interests and preoccupations of a distracting kind pressed upon Lewis. For one thing he was editor-in-chief of the *Yellow Un,* a sprightly organ, nominally a College magazine founded by himself, *pour rire,* in the great cause of gayety: and conducted on a coöperative, strictly altruistic, nonprofit basis. Therefore the *Yellow Un* was designed to divert, startle and (incidentally) shock—an imp with a smirk on its face and a sting in its tail, in the true lineal descent from the master-mocker, Voltaire. Per contra it proclaimed with insistent zeal and infectious ardor, the grand, the paramount duty of enjoyment. *Vogue la galere,* and the devil take the hindmost in the pursuit of pleasure. Altogether an enterprise to tickle the budding satirist into ripples of glee.

That evening, after a clever evasion of his father, who held embarrassing notions of his own on the ethics of conduct, Lewis set off briskly to meet his associate editors at staff headquarters in Bolem's tavern.

There a grimy recess was curtained off for editorial use, rent free, in view of benefits accruing. To bumpers of "Ten year old" it was hilariously christened the Mermaid Alcove; and to justify the pleasantry the walls were decorated with portraits of jovial Elizabethan wits, torn from a publisher's catalogue. In the interest of realism a local artist gratuitously added a picture of Falstaff, royally quaffing a cup of sack between Mistress Quickly and Bardolf of the flaming nose.

Editorially Lewis was helped by two blithe, kindred spirits, picked up at an amateur debating society, the flamboyant Speculative, or "Spec," and carefully infected

with his own rousing doctrines. The present meeting was to be entirely devoted to business: for of late other attractions had been seducing the faithful and there were heaped up arrears of wit, humor, and satire to be worked off on an unsuspecting public.

"Gentlemen," Lewis remarked blandly, as the trio took their seats at a battered table, under a paralytic gas jet that barely made the darkness visible. "Gentlemen, we be men-of-letters stooping to comic journalism, *pro hac vice*—forgive the dear old tag from the Latin classroom. Lucifer son of the morning in the motley of Harlequin, a thing for laughter." He grimaced broadly as in guarantee of good faith. "You know the journalistic axiom. 'Booze and brilliancy go together.' Let it not be said we fail to honor the sacred rite of the craft. Bolem, three stoups please: and, my dearly beloved Tobias no fusel oil on pain of being pilloried. It would distress us to make you the hero of a lampoon."

Bolem sniffed a little in justifiable resentment.

"Ye ken I never adulterate. Anyway for you," he added with unconscious honesty. "There's not a headache in a barrel o't."

"Nor a stomach ache either, I hope," observed Lewis affably. "This night we need nimble brains, my dear Bol-em-over; so a jorum of your best."

There were difficulties. In the new number the *piece de resistance* was meant to be "Umbrellas"; but, as Lewis was obliged to explain, its appearance must be postponed. However he had thoughtfully brought a pocketful of his recent most sprightly verse.

"What do you think of this?" he asked with a chuckle, and read them "An Ode to a Lady's Smile."

"Umph!" said the second in command who thought

himself a realist. "Never imagined you could get so excited over a petticoat. Do to fill up, though. So much easier filling up with jingling rhyme than with good solid sensible prose. Saves the trouble of bothering about sense."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Lewis with a mock obeisance. "Of course you throw off such trifles without being aware of it. But don't be proud just because you're so gifted."

The other snorted contemptuously. "I have been many kinds of a fool; but not that particular kind of a fool. Let's get ahead. Whew! what a beastly mess. This can't be literature: looks more like pigs' wash."

"Have another drink," counselled Lewis. "No solvent of disgust like liquor. Much virtue in Usquebaugh, my son, which the French wisely call *eau de vie,* and I take leave to call *eau bènite,* thrice holy water."

He took up a proof, read a moment and gave a long heaved groan. They had lured an unfortunate professor into their net and the result was a piece of dead befogged morality.

"It might have been enough for Providence to make men sinful without making them stupid," he grumbled. "Sin by the grace of God you may overcome, but stupidity never. This unlucky beast with the heavy tread——"

"Have another drink," grinned the second in command. "No solvent of disgust like liquor."

But before it was possible to comply the curtain swung back and Charlie entered, accompanied by a heavily moustached, black-browed stranger, who was grinning from ear to ear. Lewis leaped to his feet.

"*C'est pardieu!* by all that's holy, Bob," he cried,

clutching wildly at the stranger. *"Nom d'un chien! c'est donc toi, mon vieux. Comment vas tu?"*

"Pas si mal, Louis, mon bien ami," answered Bob. *"Et toi même?"*

"Most devilishly and unutterably glad to see you, old boy," responded Lewis, his eyes dancing with unfeigned joy. "Straight from Paris, eh?"

Bob nodded. "With a pause in London to look round some haunts of sin."

There were introductions: then with a wave of his hand over the littered table. "What's all this? What revels are in hand?"

"Muck," replied Lewis tersely. "Muck, miscalled literary. A new order of Grub Street debauched by old Scotch, bad tobacco and natural stupidity—a thing you have no knowledge of, *mon ami.*"

"Where ignorance is bliss," interjected the second in command, trying to be sardonic.

Lewis gave him a benignant smile. "Forgive us our youth," he remarked genially, turning to Bob. "We do our best to be cynical: but in a little while we'll be romping optimists. Well! *mon cher,* and how goes *la vie Parisienne?*"

"Gay as ever I'm glad to say," Bob replied heartily. "And Auld Reekie?"

"Glum as ever," was the quick answer. "East winds, bleak faces, bigotry, and all uncharitableness, with avalanches of sermons reeking of damnation. They say Old Nick is up and off. Couldn't stand it any longer."

"Poor old deil," chuckled Bob. "And has gayety gone with him, the exquisite exercise of lovemaking, for example?" He knew something of his cousin's accomplishments in that popular art.

"Hush," returned Lewis, lowering his voice to an awed solemnity. "Such things are under the rose, my boy. We wear our rue becomingly; we respect appearances. Your wanton Paris takes its pleasures brazenly. We reverence the Ten Commandments publicly and take our pleasures on the sly. Thus, sir, by judicious discretion, we save our faces and sin in safety, *ad lib.* Only, and here's the rub, some of us, woe's me, are still novices in the great, the invaluable art of hiding."

Charlie, ever practical, broke in on the tittering with a reminder that the attentive Bolem was politely and patiently standing by for orders.

"Pardon, pardon," cried Lewis, apologetically. "Bob, my son, I take it you are thirsty. Railway travelling dries one up so."

"Thirsty as a limekiln after six months steady firing," answered Bob candidly.

He was promptly supplied with the appropriate medicine, the others joining according to the established code of good-fellowship. Then, without discussion, proofs and manuscripts were swept up and stuffed into a handbag several sizes too small for its bulky contents. That done it was tied with a frayed leather strap and handed to Mr. Bolem for safe keeping.

"Put it in your safe," directed Lewis. "And remember, my dear Bol-em-over, that it is more precious than rubies. Rubies you may buy for cash; the fruits of genius are priceless."

"I'll lock the thing up," said Bolem, making an ambiguous mouth. "When'll ye be wantin' it again?"

"Sometime in the sweet and rosy future," replied Lewis. "To-morrow perhaps: perhaps the day after. No hurry; an infinity of time ahead. We'll let you know."

If the magazine were a little delayed, well! it was not likely the sky would fall. Indeed delay would be an advantage since it would whet curiosity. In any case there was no need for slavish punctuality which was the vice of sloppy commercialism.

In honor of Bob it was to be a French night, a real French night on Paris models; and for that the party of three, Lewis, Bob, and Charlie, went straight to the "Howff" by the Calton Hill. As they turned into the unsavory close someone was singing. A scout informed them that a young lady was entertaining the company, and would they please enter quietly, so as not to disturb her.

"Sweet voice," observed Bob, who knew the great singers of Europe.

At the door Lewis halted as if the breath were suddenly knocked out of him, as in truth it was. For the singer was Katie. In his blank bewilderment he did not notice how the crowded audience sat craning and fascinated, as if afraid to lose a note or a syllable. Katie did not see him, and he slipped into a half-vacant seat beside Bob, his pulses drumming, his head giddy. The song was a classic, "Ye Banks and Braes," and never surely, he felt, was its piercing, heartbroken, heartbreaking pathos rendered with such an intimate personal intensity of appeal.

On Katie's lips it was a pure gush of anguish straight from the heart. It was not the art of the singer, but the despairing wail of Nature herself over the wrecked love of a woman. So Patti or Jenny Lind might sing if either could fathom the poignancy of agonized emotion. At the stanza,

> And my fause love has sto'en the rose
> But ah! he's left the thorn wi' me

the singer faltered an instant, as if the grief she had turned to melody were veritably her own. There were tears in her voice, and there were also tears on the faces of rough, bearded listeners little given to sentiment. She sat down in a dead hush, as if the spell-bound audience could neither move nor breathe; then like a thunder burst came the volleyed applause, peal upon peal, till it seemed the roof must fly heavenward.

"Encore, encore, encore," came in delirious shouts. At the same time a score of men beside themselves with excitement, rushed forward, vociferating congratulations, Lewis among the foremost.

"Well done," he cried. "Well done. By God, that's singing."

For the first time she saw him; their eyes met, and into hers came a swift expression of fear.

"You here?" she said, below her breath; but she gave him a little smile, the mere ghost of a smile, which made his heart beat yet more riotously.

"Encore, encore," clamored the audience, clapping and stamping. "Give us more."

Lewis glanced round at the strained, urgent faces. "They will bring down the house if you don't sing again," he said.

At the same time Mossoo came up with the genuflection of an impresario before a *Prima Donna* in the flush of a Covent Garden triumph. He was hugely gratified. His little experiment, his little surprise, succeeded beyond hope or expectation.

"Loafly, loafly, Mademoiselle," he cried, his face a wreathed testimonial. "Veel Mademoiselle nod seeng agen?"

She seemed embarrassed and frightened, and Lewis

noted with surprise that there was nothing of the glow of triumph in her face. Bending quickly he remarked close in her ear. "You have taken it too much out of yourself, Katie."

She glanced up, the shadow of terror in her eyes. "I am not 'Katie' here," she returned in a quick whisper. "Don't call me that." Then doing her best to smile she turned to Mossoo. "Oh! please don't ask me to sing again," she begged. "I—I am very tired."

He bowed magnificently; then turning he beamed upon the audience. The appreciation of Mademoiselle's singing pleased her and him inexpressibly, but they must not be too greedy. She had sung them two songs, two beautiful, beautiful songs, and would sing more another time. Singing was exhausting work. As they still clamored Bob hastily pushed his way to the front.

"Don't let them force you to sing again, my dear," he told Katie earnestly. "You have performed a miracle; another would be too much. Refuse."

To Monsieur he spoke in French, real Parisian French. Mademoiselle had already overexerted herself. She was fatigued; she was agitated. There was danger in pressing her, not to speak of cruelty.

"*Oui, oui,*" agreed Monsieur, cordially, almost imagining that Bob's polished accent transported him to the centre of things in Paris. "*Oui, oui.*"

Again he turned and explained to the audience: and with another resounding shout of applause they acquiesced. Then some one in an excess of zeal suggested sending "the hat round"; but happily Mossoo prevented that indignity just in time.

"I haf engaged Mademoiselle for de bleasure of my

guests," he remarked blandly. "She is, vot you callit? a paid artiste." The announcement saved his pride and hers.

She left immediately; and a knot of ardent cavaliers, young bloods with a name to make in gallantry, schemed and elbowed for the honor of squiring her. But Lewis had whispered beseechingly.

"Give me a minute. I want a word with you."

"If you promise to leave me when you have said it," she replied; and he had no option but to accept the hard condition.

With some ostentation he flung a cloak about her shoulders, and telling Bob and Charlie that he would be back in a jiffy, he escorted her off, the envied of many watchers.

"By jingo, a beauty," exclaimed one enthusiast, condensing the general sentiment into a sentence. "And can sing, too. Almost made me weep. 'Pon my soul. Who is she?"

Mossoo grinned. A happy little discovery of his own. *Une belle charmante.* Oh! yees, he rather thought he understood the tastes of his honored patrons.

Outside Lewis let himself go in a torrent of eulogy which, had she been vain, would have swept her off her feet. Her singing was superb; more, it was pure unalloyed rapture. And he was not alone in thinking so. The delirium of applause proved that, and better still the intent, rapt devouring attention. It was a most thrilling tribute; a most magnificent triumph.

"You're a perfect marvel," he declared ecstatically. "I am proud of you. I had no idea you could do such things. Many a bouncing professional would give her ears for half your ovation."

To his astonishment she showed no pleasure in his

praise; on the contrary it appeared to make her quiver in pain.

"I had no idea I'd ever have to do such things—there," she responded, and he detected a distinct catch in her voice. For a moment he was taken utterly aback. It seemed unnatural, incredible that she should not be wildly elated.

"Aren't you pleased?" he asked, in a maze of wonder.

"No," she answered. "It was horrible. But don't let us talk about it. Your minute must be nearly up. What did you want to say to me?"

"First," he replied. "That you are really the most extraordinary girl I have ever met. I can't make you out."

"Didn't I say you couldn't? You see I was right. But please remember that time is flying."

"Tyrant," he tried to smile. "Well! here is my puzzle, or part of it. The first time we met you didn't seem to dislike me. Then, when after much searching I found you again by chance, you would scarcely speak to me. Now you run away from me as if I were the plague. What is the meaning of it all? Have I committed some unpardonable crime in my sleep or have you somehow discovered you really don't like me?"

"No," she replied frankly. "Not that, not that at all."

"Then I am utterly at sea," he said hopelessly. "Won't you tell me what it is?" He bent close and spoke with a vibrant intensity that made her draw away from him.

"I didn't think you came to ask questions," she answered, as if in protest. "If that's to be the way of it——"

"Pardon me, it isn't," he interrupted. "Only, Katie,

you will always be Katie to me when we're alone—one thing I must ask."

"Yes?" she said on a tremulous breath.

"That if you really don't dislike me this game of running away will stop. Promise to meet me again, and tell me where and when."

For a moment there was no answer. She was struggling with herself in a way he could not understand, struggling to do as conscience and honor alike seemed to dictate.

"You'll do as I wish!" he insisted eagerly. And as she still hesitated. "Don't deny me; don't think I'm jesting."

"Oh! what's the difference if we don't meet again?" she asked. "Nothing in this world matters. I don't know why people are born anyway."

"Difference?" he echoed. "It makes all the difference between misery and happiness to me. Don't think that's just talk. It isn't. You mean more to me than I can tell."

"But—but," she said, on a hard breath. "We're just strangers to each other. It can't mean so very much to you."

"But it does, Katie, it does," he rejoined, with a vehemence that thrilled her in spite of herself. "You're everything to me—from the moment I saw you. Don't say I am silly; I know my own mind, and don't be hard. Are you engaged—are you to be singing to-morrow night?"

"No not to-morrow night. To-night was just an experiment. But I don't think we'd better meet again."

He drew a deep breath that had all the sting of jealousy. "Then I suppose there's someone else?"

She shook her head. "No, there's no one else—now," she added as if to herself.

His heart gave a bounding leap. "Then it's settled. Don't deny me, unless you want to be deliberately cruel, and I'm sure it isn't in you to be that."

They had halted under a lamp-post, and more than one passerby turned to look at them curiously. Lewis neither saw nor cared; but Katie, having more self-possession, noted the inquisitive, gloating eyes. Obviously Lewis was recognized.

"You're very persistent," she said. "And as I told you before not very wise. We mustn't stand here. People are watching."

"Let them watch," he returned. "Most of them are envying me in their hearts. What I want is your promise. Will you meet me to-morrow night?"

A moment she debated as if still struggling with herself.

"Very well! since you're so pressing," she replied dizzily, for she was doing what she had resolved not to do. "For a few minutes to-morrow night. Only it's very foolish."

"Then may I never be wise," responded Lewis with unction.

"Indeed then, you're never likely to die from too much wisdom, so far's I can see," she observed. Then having named time and place. "Now you must get back to your friends. It's awfully bad manners leaving them."

"Send me away happy," he said, bending quickly toward her. "One little kiss will do it."

"Before the whole street?" she replied. "No, no, we must be wiser than that."

She slipped away with that graceful, elusive, agility of hers, smiling slightly. He watched her, feeling that, for good or ill, she carried his happiness with her.

"Fate," he observed to himself, turning slowly away. "Ineluctable fate. Ineluctable," he repeated, savoring the word, like an epicure turning over a sweet morsel on his tongue. Lewis prided himself on being an artist in words.

CHAPTER XIV

HAPPILY Bob was by to assuage the pangs of waiting through an eternity of twenty-four hours. Lewis spent most of the night and all next day with him—swapping confidences, rehearsing, with caustic or comic detail, the evils and humors of his lot, and learning with rabid envy and longing of French supremacy in the Elysian art of pleasure.

"Wait, my boy, wait till I introduce you to Paris," Bob exclaimed at least twenty times. "I promise you an eye-opener."

"May the good Lord vouchsafe that felicity soon," quoth Lewis, his heart leaping in anticipation.

To him Bob was the beau ideal of all that is admirable in man,—the artist in life, the blithe daring adventurer who moved strange women to paroxysms of love and strange men to fervors of admiration, a philosopher with a gift of riotous humor, a humorist holding firmly to the bedrock of sanity and wisdom—and this above all, a true blue Bohemian to his finger-tips, a past master where Lewis felt himself to be but a tentative and faltering amateur. Those were living bonds of comradeship.

It was Bob, the musical critic, who swung suddenly to Katie and her amazing, ravishing gift of song.

"By gosh! if only they had her in Italy for a little while," he broke out, his dark eyes alight with enthusiasm. "Anything would be possible."

"Turn her out a star?" said Lewis, with a quick responsive quiver.

"Of the first magnitude," returned Bob ardently.

"Or shall we say a real Scottish nightingale? Training would do marvels. A little less nature and a little more art, and she'd be very near perfection."

"What?" cried Lewis. "Do away with the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin?"

"By no means," answered Bob, lapsing into the critic. "By no manner of means. If nature doesn't set the tune art labors in vain. Only nature is apt to get out of hand. It must be controlled. At present our nightingale allows it to run away with her. She makes the sentiment of what she sings too much her own, takes it shall we say? too much to heart. At one point last night she was on the very verge of a breakdown from sheer emotion. In fact I thought for an instant she was gone. Training would get her over that danger, besides giving the last consummate touch which marks the finished artist in everything. You know that, *mon cher*. If I were rich I'd have her off to Italy to-morrow."

Lewis drew a long, deep breath. "And then? Think she'd fetch a Parisian audience, say in the Place de l'Opera?"

"Provided she did herself justice and gave it something it could understand Paris would be at her feet," replied Bob warmly. "Quite magically she reveals the hidden soul of harmony beloved by Milton. A born singer if ever there was one, and maugre a natural conceit I claim in all modesty to know something of singing and singers. Who on earth is she?"

Lewis had but a single piece of authentic information to give—that she was Highland, like love itself, a native of the hills.

"And you know," he added ecstatically. "She carries

the heather bloom in her face and the heather fragrance in her hair, in her whole being."

Bob smiled. Then all at once became grave.

"Ah!" he said thoughtfully. "A Celt, dowered, no rather cursed, with the full tale of racial qualities, idealism, sentiment, ardor, loyalty, sensitiveness, and what follows, an infinite capacity to suffer. A potential tragedy heroine. Poor girl! And she's by way of being a beauty, too, in her innocent rustic fashion."

"Rustic," echoed Lewis with just a twinge of pique. "Not up to the Paris standard of decorative art, eh?"

"Well! as to style—hardly," Bob replied with smiling candor. "I fancy they could teach her something over there; too much perhaps. A good girl, I judge, if she got a chance. There's the rub." He paused; then suddenly he asked:

"What was she doing in such a place last night? To speak plainly it isn't either a temple of virtue or the vestibule to grand opera."

A little lamely Lewis admitted that the reason for her appearance on the "howff" platform was "wropt in mystery"; but he expected to get light on the darkness soon, that very night probably.

Bob smiled wisely. "*La grande maladie* I perceive," he remarked. "Well! our brilliant friends the French have a proverb that the first sigh of love is the last sigh of wisdom. Beware! *Festina lente.* Go slowly. Prudence, *mon cher,* that's the watchword when one play's with fire."

Lewis laughed scoffingly. "Prudence. You preaching prudence, you who openly scorn that pudding-headed, rotten-hearted deity Convention. You mean cowardice, of course. The thing called prudence, my dear fellow, does

more harm in this hapless world than ten legions of devils working overtime could ever accomplish."

"Perhaps," agreed Bob, half whimsically, half seriously. "Perhaps. Still, *mon ami,* caution in playing with fire may obviate burned fingers."

And as Lewis gesticulated fierce dissent.

"Listen my son. Last night that girl revealed herself, quite unconsciously, of course. I watched her; rouse passion in her and she'd go through the very flames of hell. What then? Cleopatra was splendid; but she did for Antony."

"Oh! for another Serpent of Old Nile," sighed Lewis. "One hour of Antony's glorious infatuation were worth a lifetime of tepid love, plus all the success of Cæsar. I envy Antony, my good Socrates, much more than I pity him."

Having an active imagination, liberally spiced with egotism, Lewis felt in himself much of the noble Roman who sacrificed all for love of a woman; and it was certainly with the headlong abandon of Antony he set out to keep his appointment with Katie.

A burning impatience, a heady desire to clasp her in his arms took him a full half hour too soon to the trysting place; and he passed the time planning how the promised minute could be stretched like a straight line—to infinity. Would the gods be kind? On one thing he was resolved, that having got her again he would not let her slip away from him. Fifty times at least he looked at his watch, remarking it must be slow, wondering what was keeping her and telling himself with a cold spasm, she might not come at all. What if her promise was just a ruse to put him off, or did she mean to break it again? He had never had to wait on and coax a girl in this fashion before,

never. When at last she appeared, punctual to the moment, he ran to meet her.

"What a business is this waiting," he cried. "I thought you were never coming. What has kept you?"

"Oh! but I am not late," she replied, smiling at his impatience. The smile he promptly took as a good omen.

He noted that she seemed to be in better spirits, and the glimpse he caught of her face in the light of a street lamp told him she was recovering some of her natural radiance of color. "She's glad," he told himself. "Really glad"; and the thought sent an electric tingle along his nerves. But to his keen disappointment she made it clear that she meant to abide strictly by their arrangement. She was just a little too much a girl of her word.

"I shouldn't have come at all," she informed him. "I must say again that we're not very wise, either of us."

"And I must say again who wants to be wise?" he rejoined. "Not me. Don't take to preaching, I beseech you. That would spoil everything."

"Oh! but I think a good sermon would be just the thing for you," she said, and there was actually a little trill of laughter in her voice. "Don't you like preaching?"

"About as much as a cat loves vivisection," he answered. "Don't tell me you like it."

"Yes, I do though," she returned decisively. "Anyway I used to and I can't give up my old beliefs. I have walked five miles to hear a famous preacher before to-day."

"And felt quite goody-goody in consequence," remarked Lewis.

"Yes," she agreed. "I felt very much the better for it, and I won't have you run down preaching."

Lewis smiled the smile of superior wisdom. She really was as innocent as she looked.

"My dear girl," he rejoined. "The bane of this delightful land of ours is its excessive endless preaching. It's so much a mania with us that we forget to be happy; and happiness is a duty—the first of duties, if you ask me."

"That's preaching, isn't it?" she laughed. He laughed in return.

"Neatly caught. Well! I'm for the real thing. Let us be happy, Katie."

She thought a moment and then asked simply, "What is happiness?" as Pilate once asked, "What is truth?" Only unlike Pilate's auditors Lewis had his answer, his gospel ready. Walking close by her side, he expounded with moving eloquence the alluring faith that God owes His creatures happiness and that recognizing the obligation He created Love. That was always cardinal.

"Ah! but love is very, very cruel," she objected with sudden vehemence. "Love can be the most cruel thing in the world. It breaks hearts and wrecks lives. Does God mean that? If so then Love is not what poor deluded people think it. Love and happiness don't go together, except in dreams, and in daylight we laugh at dreams, don't we?"

He regarded her with a concentrated look of amazement, trying to catch her expression. "How or where did you learn that?" he thought, with a flashing conception of all it might mean. Ah! now he was beginning to understand certain things that had puzzled him. Aloud he said:

"Why, Katie, you're quite tragically poetic or poetically tragic, which ever way you like to put it. But you're wrong, my dear, you're wrong. Why do you say such things?"

"Because they're true," she answered.

"Quite heterodox," he rejoined. "You must not be a renegade in love. That crime is unpardonable."

She was on the point of making a bitter retort about Dead Sea fruit; but held it back. "Very well," she said. "Since we can't agree we won't talk about it." It was her usual method of evading what she could not bear to discuss.

"Side-tracked again," he protested, and harked back to her triumph of the night before. The half had not been told her. She should have heard the audience when he got back. They could talk of nothing but her singing, her charm, her beauty.

"Oh! don't," she cried in a tone of real anguish. "Don't, don't."

"I'm not trying to flatter," he replied, misunderstanding her. "It was all genuine, every bit of it. And there's another thing. You remember my friend who spoke to you. He's over here from Paris; he's a musical critic and has heard all the best singers. Guess what he said. He said you are a born singer, a born singer. What do you think of that?"

She made no reply. Though in the darkness he could not see her face, she was biting her lip as in excruciating pain. Piqued by her silence, her seeming indifference, he remarked upbraidingly.

"You don't seem to realize what you did or appreciate your good fortune. Wasn't your success sweet to you?"

"No, it wasn't," she answered, almost, as it seemed, in an explosion of wrath. "I have told you already that it was horrible."

Her tone staggered him. What did she mean? Could any girl, he would not say with vanity, but with common human feelings find such an ovation as hers horrible?

Before he could recover she was saying that time was up and she must go. Jerked back to reality he tried to slip an arm about her waist to detain her; but once more she was too quick for him. He drew in his breath sharply, with a little tingle of resentment.

"Katie," he protested. "Why do you always treat me in this way? Are we to be forever like this, or had we better part?" He had scarcely spoken when he was cursing himself for a fool.

"Yes," she replied, as if taking him at his word. "I think we had better part."

Breathless with fright he tried to correct his blunder. "I didn't mean that, Katie. I take it back. We cannot part, simply cannot, you understand."

She stood three feet off regarding him with a tense questioning look. Her slender figure swayed slightly, and her face illumined by the moon, had an expression he could not read. He failed to see the quick rise and fall of her bosom.

"You don't know what you are doing or saying," she replied, a world of meaning in her tone.

He had an impulse to take her in his arms, to smother her objections with kisses; but something in her attitude, something new and strange in his experience of girls, restrained him.

"Why do you say that?" he asked. "Give me some credit, Katie. I am not a child."

"No," she agreed. "You are a man, and men are sillier than children."

He tried to laugh; but the effort was hollow. His heart was pounding: his mouth and throat were suddenly dry.

"Well anyway I know my own mind this time," he

rejoined. "And silly or not silly I cannot let you go. You said love is cruel. Don't you——"

"It is, it is cruel," she interrupted. "That is why people should not meddle with it. I think we had better part. No good would come of our meeting."

He gasped coldly. Never before had he been treated in this fashion. And she had begun by smiling on him, encouraging him. What was the meaning of it all, or what lay behind this unaccountable behavior?

"I refuse to take that answer," he returned wildly. "You can't mean it. Come, tell me when we are to meet again. Are you to be singing in that place to-morrow night?"

"Yes. I have promised to sing to-morrow night, and I want you to promise not to be there."

His heart gave a leap. "Anything," he replied quickly. "Anything. Only let it be giff-gaff. We'll exchange promises. It'll be hell to keep away—but never mind. Is it a bargain?"

They had reached a quiet spot in an outlying street. She described the figure 8 with the toe of her boot on the dusty sidewalk. Then looking up she said, with forced quietness.

"It's foolishness. We'd both regret it."

"Regret it," he cried. "Never for my part. To be with you is heaven, Katie, just to be with you."

"Ah! but you mightn't say that later on," she rejoined. "You must think of that."

"I'll say it as long as I have breath," he declared. "For I know it is true."

With an impulsive, giddy movement he caught her hand. It was trembling as from uncontrollable emotion. To his surprise, his joy, she made no attempt to withdraw

it; rather it seemed to nestle in his own as for protection and comfort.

"Katie," he said, and the very air seemed to vibrate with passion. "I am not going to let you go. Don't play with me or think I don't mean all I say. Upon my soul and honor, as God sees me I am in earnest." He caught his breath with a click like one choking. "Don't you see, can't you understand that I love you?"

A shiver as of dread passed through her.

"Oh! you mustn't, you mustn't talk like that," she cried. And as if she could endure no more. "I must go."

"Your promise," he said, tightening his grip on her hand. She felt helpless, with the helplessness that is half fear, half crazy joy.

"Very well, very well," she returned in an agitated quiver. "The night after to-morrow then, at the same time and place. And now—please—please let me go—alone."

"You're too precious," he responded. "Why should I let you go?"

"Because—because I ask you," she stammered.

He released her at once. For half a dozen steps she ran; then wheeling she ran as swiftly back and with the darting quickness of a bird kissed him on the cheek.

"There," she panted, like one terrorized by her own action. "There. No, no," as his arm shot out to encircle her. "Not now; not to-night."

CHAPTER XV

CELESTIAL intoxication would but lamely describe Lewis's feeling as he turned and strode away. His whole being was a lilting choral chant, a lyric symphony. Katie had kissed him, kissed him of her own free, passionate accord. He could still feel the sweet, surprising impact of her lips on his cheek, still thrilled to its delicious, ineffable shock. Yes, Katie had kissed him, leaving an exultation that made it hard to refrain from the open scandal of shouting aloud and dancing a jig of jubilation in the street. Kisses were no novelty, for he was no stranger in that Arcadia where the business of girls is to kiss, fondle, and flatter, and he had taken it all as the prerogative of the superior sex. This was something wholly different, something ethereal, divine that whirled him aloft into empyrean spaces, far, far removed from the sordid and sensual.

Knowing he could see her but for a little while he had arranged to resume the interrupted business with his co-editors in Bolem's Tavern; and on the way he called for Bob and Charlie, who were to be admitted as privileged guests. Never was there a merrier editorial meeting; never probably one that more joyously ignored all that was merely practical and utilitarian. Bolem, all cordiality and moisture, ministered dutifully, and Lewis, setting the tune as "Boss" was boisterously gay. A casual reference by Charlie to the "Highland houri" brought a whirlwind of chaffing, and a suggestion from the second in command that her portrait should grace the next number of the magazine. They wanted something spicy, arresting, sensational, beautiful and romantic.

"Then, my dear fellow," retorted Lewis. "Let's have your own phiz. All competent judges agree there's an irresistible fascination in the supremely ugly."

The second in command studied him gravely a moment, as if seriously considering the matter.

"We can do better than that," he said. "Yours, sir, and the fortune of the magazine is made."

The pleasantry was received with an explosion of laughter, a jolly headlong good humor being a tacit *sine qua non* of the partnership.

"Anything," observed Lewis, with an air of getting to business, "except the dull. Our own modest aspirations—need I state them? Something piquantly devilish, you know, something gingery enough to titillate the palate and remain hot on it for weeks and weeks—there's the ideal. Our trusty and well-beloved friends, the unco guid and the rigidly righteous, may Heaven reward them for all their mercies! are fairly spoiling for a new sensation. Let 'em have it. Bob," he cried, as with a sudden inspiration. "You're the very man to set the heather on fire. A leetle article on the gay iniquities of the gayest of cities, all alive with wit and wickedness, there's your cue. Oblige us, *mon cher,* 'The Devil's Playground. By an Expert,' billed in big blazing type. How's that for an eye-catcher?"

"With the sub-heading, 'Or How Sinners Dance to Perdition,'" suggested the second in command. "Quite fetching in a community of saints. Yes."

Charlie chortled and heaved in merriment; Lewis slapped his leg in glee. "Behold I see golden wisions. Shocked readers screaming vengeance and the *Yellow Un* a-soarin' and a-soarin'."

"And getting excommunicated in the process," put in the ever practical Charlie.

"The height, the very acme of success," cried Lewis. "Then let us pray that come it may, fast and furious. Denounced in public and devoured in secret. The heather blazing, and Respectability running for its life. I hug myself. Bob, my son, on with your laughing cap. Hot stuff, mind, with real Parisian seasoning, a dash of—ah! um, the exquisite virtues of La Belle France in her chosen haunts of pleasure. The adorable Mrs. Grundy is itching to gabble. Give her fits. Scandalize her into hysterics. Let your natural and acquired wickedness have scope, and for honorarium you shall have a free copy of a periodical unique, sir, in the annals of literatoor. Bol-em-over, you skulking eaves-dropper, another round of your best."

There was another round for inspiration; then one for luck; then yet another for good-fellowship and the honor of the craft.

"It's a bargain, isn't it?" Lewis asked, still tingling from many suppressed emotions.

"We'll see what can be done," replied Bob amiably. "If the comic muse doesn't sulk."

"Oh! tickle the jade and she'll laugh," said Lewis. "Feminine, you know, and likes coaxing. We want a booming advertisement. Then, by Jiminy, the *Yellow Un* will be a secret and thrilling delight in every chaste bedroom and boudoir in this chastest of cities. One real, outrageous *succès de scandal* and we're made."

He looked round with the jubilant air of an editor who scents a glorious scoop. "Is that all then?" he inquired.

"I thought," answered the second in command gloomily, "we were to put the damn thing to bed." He prided

himself on his knowledge of journalese. Some day he meant to go to Fleet Street.

"Most excellent Theophilus," responded Lewis sweetly. "A consummation devoutly to be wished, only the bed isn't quite made yet. The victim may have to be stretched or shortened a bit, procrustean style. We await the favors of fortune and our new contributor," smiling upon Bob. "And that," he concluded blithely, "ends our present business, I think."

Without more ado the *Yellow Un,* very much in tattered, inky fragments, was bundled back into its bag and solemnly redelivered to Bolem for safe-keeping. That done the curtain, that concealed more than Orphic mysteries, was flung aside, and the editorial party stepped forth to join the jovial throng without.

They were received with acclamation by a full house, Mr. Bolem's clientele, male and female, being present in force. Lewis and Charlie came as comrades, brothers in the jolly free-masonry of conviviality. Over Bob there was some hesitation. He was hard to size up by local standards. His cosmopolitan air, his careless smile, amiable yet not without a suggestion of mockery, his clothes, his polished speech, all these were cause for curiosity and uncertainty. In addressing him some even used a politic "Sir," a form of respect which your independent, democratic Scot practises with exceeding thrift. And on the whole perhaps it was well the company could not read Bob's private thoughts and impressions.

Still in the throes of irrepressible elation and eager to show his paces, Lewis quickly took his place as the protagonist of the play. He was pronounced to be in "great form," and the compliment was an added inspiration. As usual the ladies were specially gracious.

"And how is the poetry business going, Velvet Coat?" inquired one siren, breathing a rich liquorish perfume in his face. "Why don't you make a nice wee song all for ourselves here?"

"A song," he cried. "Would you like it?" He was in the mood for singing.

"What a question," gurgled the siren, with a languishing smile. "And make it Scotch. I hate the affecket namby-pamby jeely-like English things. Nae pith in them."

Now in his poetic ardors he had foreseen just such a contingency as this and had providently thought out some appropriate sentiments. Luckily, certain of them were still fresh in his mind. Instantly his notebook was out and he was scribbling fervently.

"Listen, everybody. Velvet Coat is making a song for us, all just for ourselves," the lady announced at large; and there was a titter of expectation. Next minute Lewis declaimed grandly this piece of undiluted vernacular.

"Dinna fash yersel' wi' thinkin'
Thinkin's puir exchange for drinkin'
Fill yer gless and let's be clinkin'
Here's to them that loe the Yill."

A roar of delighted appreciation went up.

"Fine, grand, first class, the very thing," chimed a dozen voices in chorus: and they chanted riotously:

"Fill yer gless an let's be clinkin'
Here's to them that loe the Yill,

and here's to you, Lewis, my lad. Hip, hip, hooray."

Then, with an eye to possible benefits to come, someone prudently remembered Bolem.

"And here's to Toby," he called lustily. "Let's be

clinkin' again. There ye are," he cried, when the clamor of the clinking died down. "Man Toby, didn't I say we'd hae ye a bailie yet? That'll be a day for the drunks. Ay, and Lord Provost. What for no? The lang goon and the gold chain would be very becomin' wi' the bit locket adornin' the croon o' yer stomach. Rale bonnie it would look."

Mr. Bolem smiled expansively, and it seemed he was actually verging on free drinks, when the harsh voice of criticism broke in jarringly. It came from Geordie, whose early love verse, as has been recorded, Lewis had wantonly ridiculed.

"A bonnie wee mannie," he observed contemptuously, fixing his gaze on Lewis. "Lang hair, pairted in the middle like a lassie's and a' that. Verra, verra bonnie. But as to the bit jingle o' rhyme any daftie, three pairts drunk, could turn oot screeds o't, if he gave his mind to the thing."

"Are ye drunk enough, d'ye think, to hae a fling at it yersel, Geordie," someone guffawed. "Yer a poet too, are ye no?"

But Geordie was not to be lured into the pitfalls of competitive verse, no not even by a flaming jealousy. He owed it to his dignity not to enter into rivalry with a mountebank.

"Am no' enterin' for a competeetion the day," he answered acidly. Then bending his eyes more virulently on Lewis:

"Better gie us a whang aboot the lasses noo. From a man o' your experience it should be edifyin'. Just something aboot a canty hour ye lane wi' a lassie in a lonely spot by the seashore."

Lewis flushed as if he had been struck a treacherous blow.

"I'll trouble you to mind your own business and let my private affairs alone," he said on a sudden note of anger.

Geordie threw back his head with a truculent, provocative laugh.

"Ay, it suits you to do things in the dark. Could ye no' let the lassie alane, seein' she wanted nane o' ye? A'm telt she clean ran away from you, which shows she has some sense for a' she's a——"

"Stop," cut in Lewis, a ring in his voice that brought up the company like a shock of electricity. "Not another word, you foul-mouthed toad."

For himself he might treat insults and insinuations with contempt. Custom had made him thick-skinned in that respect. But Katie! No innuendo, no breath of scandal must tarnish her name. Nor should it while he had an atom of spirit left to defend her. And who was this pot-house sot, this mass of corruption to jeer or gibe at anybody?

Geordie paused, as a wild beast might pause to gather itself for a leap. From purple, its normal color, his face went suddenly to apoplectic red.

"Ye ca' me foul-mouthed," he retorted ferociously. "You that's got the morals of a——"

"Stop," interrupted Lewis again, and this time still more peremptorily. "One word more and as sure as you're a dirty lying, soaking old sponge I'll make you eat your slanders."

For an instant Geordie glared in speechless fury; he seemed on the point of exploding. Then recovering himself he affected amused disdain.

"Fine at the braggin'," he cackled huskily. "Oh, ay, fine at the braggin'. But listen an' I'll let ye hae a bit more o' the truth while we're about it. You, you're no fit to be spued out of a decent man's mouth and as for the girl——"

He got no further. Like a dart of lightning Lewis was on his feet and before a word could be spoken he had struck Geordie a stinging right-hander full on the face.

"I warned you," he panted, as Geordie drew back hand on mouth. "Take that for your damned filthy insinuations, and if it's not enough you shall have more of the same medicine."

His eyes were sparks of fire; his slim boyish figure, ridiculously slight in contrast with the gross bulk of Geordie, swelled and quivered. In the general astonishment no one attempted to interfere. Differences between gentlemen were no rarity in that hall of harmony. Usually they were settled verbally, with occasional recourse to the arbitrament of fists. Such incidents scarcely caused a ripple of surprise. But no one had ever thought of Lewis as a possible potential pugilist. Hence the wide-eyed amazement. The men drew in their breath sharply; from the women came a tumultuous sough, half excitement, half admiration. Here was a new Velvet Coat, a very gallant gentleman, a cavalier of whose prowess any girl might be proud.

Still regarding Geordie with fixed fiery eyes he made a movement as if to strike again. But this time Bob and Charlie gently intervened. In the same moment a man who had been watching in a pulseless intensity of interest leaped to his feet, his glass held high.

"Here's to Lewis," he cried. "Here's to Lewis. By

gosh! He's the champion. The only pity is that the girl isn't here to see him."

Wiping his mouth Geordie lay back, prudently content to nurse his wrath and bide his time. The rest of the company rustled excitedly, murmuring or shouting applause. Lewis had drawn blood and proved his courage in a popular cause. Hooray for Velvet Coat!

That night, he walked proudly out of Bolem's tavern an acclaimed hero.

CHAPTER XVI

NEXT day for a variety of reasons, all prudent, Lewis took Bob southward into the country, out past Blackford Hill and the Braids, to a cottage set snugly at a rock foot among trees, facing the Pentlands. It was his summer home whither in his varying erratic moods he sometimes loved to retire for the joys of stillness and solitude, of poetry and romance. His forebears, the Covenanters, had been there " red-wat-shod," leaving memorials of themselves which fascinated his eager imagination. Prince Charlie's men had also been there and left memorials of another kind. There was still, the initiated said, a smack of Gaeldom in and about the thatched, drowsing, half-forgotten, old-world hamlet of Swanston.

To insure the comfort of her laddie, Cummy preceded them. Lewis had fervently assured her there was no need; but she knew better. Not for her the absurdity that the boy who toddles at your apron string and holds on falteringly to your hand, and says his prayers at your knee can ever really grow up to be wise and independent and able to take care of himself.

After luncheon, at which Lewis insisted she should preside, the pair set off in bounding spirits to climb the green slope of Caerketton, just across a narrow dip from Swanston Cottage.

" Ye'll be meetin' John Tod," Cummy remarked, seeing them off. " That's the shepherd," she informed Bob. "A great friend o' Lewis's and a good man when he minds himsel and doesna swear. While's he's just fearsome. The Lord only kens what'll become o' him in the hinner end."

"Yes," laughed Lewis. "The Lord kens, Cummy. So that's all right. We needn't worry."

"Listen till him," cried Cummy, with an adoring look at her boy. "That's him a' owre. I'm fair done out tryin' to make him wise. Now run away wi' ye, and leave me to my work."

They were boisterously merry; for Cummy's luncheon was excellent, and the day gloriously fine among the hills, with perfumed caressing airs and a sky of Italian blue. The sunshine, the breeze, the scent of bog myrtle, the song of larks, the plash and tinkle of running water, all that made the prime and pride of a Scottish summer, mingled with their blood and sent an ineffable exhilaration about their hearts.

Suddenly Lewis hallooed. On a knoll close by, an uncouth, portentous figure stood outlined against the sky. With it were two dogs, and these after a moment's bristling rushed down headlong and leaped upon him. They knocked him over, he aiding and abetting, and the three rolled together, with shouts and yelps of delight. For the dogs knew Lewis as dogs know a playmate who enjoys having his hands worried and his face licked. Their owner, a great hairy giant, came striding after them and seized Lewis's hand in a grip that might well have broken bones. To the modish Bob he politely doffed his cap.

"Well! what's afoot now, Todd?" Lewis asked fraternally.

"Speanin'," (weaning) replied Todd. "Come by at this time to-morrow and ye'll hardly be able to hear yersel speakin'." To Bob he explained that on the morrow ewes and lambs were to be separated and that the air would be dismal with bleatings of woe. "Man or beast, sir," he observed. "It's a sore business the losin' o' one's mother."

He was obliged to hurry off, but hoped for another meeting soon. When he was gone Bob, recalling Cummy's words, remarked. "Why! he didn't swear once."

Lewis laughed gently. "Didn't like to show off before strangers; but hear him when steam's up. He's a born artist of the lurid. In the art of picturesque profanity John is a past master. I owe him much."

High up near the top, they threw themselves luxuriously on a couch of warm moss and let their vision range over the varied panorama of hill and sky, plain and sea, spread out before them.

"A pleasant Pisgah view," observed Bob, taking in the scene with an artist's eye. "Snow-white clouds, shot with gold, sailing like celestial barges in the vasty blue above; the green earth and sparkling sea beneath; and between the lucent sunshine and the perfumed breeze! Paradise enow, eh?"

"Only the book and the jug of wine lacking," said Lewis, remembering his Omar. "Material for a Turner picture, Bob my boy."

"Or a rousing book," returned Bob. "See yonder's the Bass. Something there for an aspiring romancer; and close by Berwick Law, that's richer yet in inspiration. Think of that great night when Montrose on bended knee swore fealty to the ungrateful Charles—a hero who still awaits his Homer. Lewis, you must tell the great tale. And when you have made us tingle with the Graham, hark back a bit and set Mary in your picture gallery. There's a heroine for you. Romance incarnate. Vandals chopped off her beautiful head: but she has everlasting revenge. Wherever men have hearts or know the meaning of chivalry there she reigns unrivalled. My Queen, I

salute you," and he raised his straw hat reverently as to an actual, living presence.

"They lived in the brave days of old," said Lewis, his imagination kindling as at the touch of fire. "By jove! but they lived. In comparison we are weevils in a biscuit—anæmic, timorous, fretful, longing to have, yet afraid to take. We are just pallid invalids, pecking at life and eternally suffering from cowardice and moral indigestion. We lack guts."

Bob smiled. "A sad lack. Still be it yours to make our blood race with a taste of the good old life. And in delineating Mary don't forget her would-be lover, honest, bawling John Knox who because she wouldn't kiss and not tell, turned and stung like a scorpion. 'He garred me greet.' You remember Mary's pathetic plaint. *Un galant homme.* Yes, damn them, they garred her greet. And incidentally mark you something significant. John went to France and they sent him to the galleys; he came back and they put him into the pulpit. And there, *mon ami,* you have in a nutshell the essential difference between La Belle France and this land of rabid preachers and persecutors. It explains ever so many things, subterranean pleasures and much else, including Bolem's tavern. *Voila!*"

Bolem's tavern in truth lay heavily on his mind, not because it differed for better or worse from other taverns in the devoted land of Knox. It just happened that he had seen it in full operation, and his keen eyes saw at a glance precisely what it meant for Lewis. "Making sport for Philistines," he said to himself, with a feeling equally blended of anger, and loathing. And what Philistines! he reflected, gross, insolent, licentious, sodden, the crude revolting negation of all that gave grace, charm, beauty to life. *Vomissement du diable.*

What was Lewis doing in that Galley? "Not here, oh Apollo, are haunts meet for thee," he quoted mentally. Lewis was fond of calling himself a reincarnation of the unfortunate Robert Fergusson, the wild youth who perished miserably of drink and madness. Was it to be another case of wrecked genius?

"No," decided Bob fiercely. "Not if I can prevent it, not if I can put a spoke in the wheel of debasing folly."

But while he watched tentatively for an opening, Lewis was off headlong on another tack. By chance Katie was mentioned, and he asked eagerly what Bob thought of her.

"Can't just fathom a woman by seeing her once and hearing her sing," replied Bob with judicious reserve.

"No, of course not, quite so," Lewis assented, a trifle chilled by what he felt was lack of proper enthusiasm. "Still you're a pretty cute judge and must have your own very definite impression."

"Yes," agreed Bob. "I have. And if you want to know it, it's this, that I'd give my soul to paint her and get her hung at Burlington House."

"That's an idea," cried Lewis, instantly on fire. "Carry it out and your fortune's made. There won't be anything more beautiful in London's famed Academy. I mean just as you saw and heard her."

"Yes," responded Bob. "If I could paint her just as I saw and heard her my fortune would be made. At any rate a work of enduring art would be added to our rather sparse gallery of portraits. For from the painter's point of view she was superb."

Lewis could scarcely contain himself.

"Superb," he echoed. "Superb! That from you, Bob. I say, you're going it."

"There was fame in that throat alone," continued

Bob, weighing his words with almost unbearable deliberation. "Then the poise of her head—perfect, natural, unstudied, and her expression absolutely unstudied also—why! any artist would tell you they were things to go crazy over."

"Then do it, do it," urged Lewis excitedly, his heart pounding. "I know what you think of her singing. Show now what you think of herself—just herself. I knew she'd appeal to you."

"She didn't appeal to me," said Bob slowly. "She captivated me. But," he paused. "Well! I could put tears into her eyes: paint and a brush would suffice for that. Unfortunately I could not paint the tears in her voice, and that's where the magic lay."

Lewis's face fell, but he was still eager. "You mean you could not paint her absolute sincerity?"

"That partly expresses it," replied Bob. "There are moments, rare moments, when some of us are permitted to rise above ourselves. Every great creative writer does at times, every painter, every singer, every actor, every artist in whatever way, who interprets human nature. It is then that genius performs its miracles, it does not know how. It was such a moment with her. There was no acting any more than there is acting in a man's cry when he is struck to the heart. As I remarked at the time she did not sing with her body, but with something invisible which for want of a better understanding we must call her soul. And she has suffered somehow. What's behind it?"

The unexpected question came with the sharpness of a pistol shot. Taken aback Lewis did not answer for a moment: then he replied frankly:

"Upon my word, I don't know, Bob. But you are right in thinking she has suffered somehow."

Bob nodded gravely. "It's a pity I am right," he said. After a pause he added, "If I am impertinent snub me and I'll shut up; if not where did you happen to fall in with her?"

"Where we were last night," answered Lewis. "In Bolem's pub as I mentioned before. It was quite a chance meeting."

He looked uneasily at Bob, dreading to see his eyes alight with cynical derision. But Bob's face was grave, singularly and surprisingly grave.

"Bolem's pub," he repeated. "Yes, now I remember." And then with a sigh as though to himself. *"La pauvre petite."*

Suddenly alarmed Lewis made haste to offer explanations.

"Don't," he said anxiously, "run away with the idea that just because—well! you know. And Bob, look here, that beast was right last night, she did run away from me, I can't imagine why. How he found out God only knows."

At a breathless gallop he explained the circumstances. Bob nodded, smiling ever so slightly.

"I believe I remarked she would be a good girl if she got a chance."

Lewis laughed an uneasy, gurgling little laugh.

"My brain must be going," he said. "I didn't understand her action, now I'm hanged if I understand you."

But Bob did not seem to hear. Absentmindedly he pulled a handful of moss, rolled it into a ball and threw it away. Then irrelevantly, as it might appear, he said:

"They credit me with being a bit of a psychologist. Funny, but they do." He grinned provokingly.

"Well?" said Lewis impatiently.

"Oh! only this, that I seem to detect the glimmer of a motive in the young lady's conduct."

In the same moment there came a long piercing whistle. Turning their heads quickly they saw the gigantic figure of the shepherd on a rock near by: he was gesticulating wildly.

"Todd working his dogs," said Lewis. "He interrupts, but never mind. Come, let us go to him. You'll see something worth looking at."

Todd nodded familiarly but curtly as they came up, and continued to gesticulate and whistle, now with abrupt, sharps turns as if angry, now with long-drawn cunning variations. Far away, so far that they appeared as mere flitting specks, two dogs were exceedingly busy with a flock of distracted sheep. Presently on a welcome call home, they came trotting back, their long tongues hanging low, their eyes, as they drew near, searching their master's face. "Have we done well?" they asked mutely.

"Lie down," he said, and they lay panting, their nozzles resting between their outstretched paws.

Then the three men, lighting pipe and cigarette, sat down, and for half an hour the visitors feasted on shepherds' lore, spiced with racy anecdote and infused with sage reflection. And as Bob listened, interpolating a question at intervals from politeness or interest (mostly the latter) he made an important discovery—to wit that for the difficult business of living the wisdom learned by hard experience on a Scottish hillside was as effective as the best that Paris or London could furnish. So that the unlettered rustic, fumbling with uncouth symbols, and the polished Monsieur Voltaire, exuding wit and culture, satire and cynicism, willy-nilly solved precisely the same problem, somehow, with no ultimate advantage to either.

While the others talked Lewis's thoughts were off on sweet voyages of their own, and soon he was deaf and blind to all about him. Then all at once as if flashed from the sky Katie stood before him. The vision was so sudden and so vivid that for an instant he caught his breath. She stood, not as he had seen her in the howff by the Calton Hill, but alone and quite motionless, frozen into stone, he felt, the fingers of both hands twined rigidly in front of her. Her eyes were perfectly dry, burningly dry. "Can't cry," he thought with subtle understanding and there was an expression on her face which would have moved a Titian or a Siddons to despair. For it was Despair made incarnate. So that was how her solution of the universal problem went.

"Poor little girl," he thought. "Poor little girl." And then, involuntarily, "Poor Lewis." Fate, the satirist, had taken them both into her net, and what would happen before they escaped, God only knew. A queer sensation, that was half a shudder, thrilled coldly through him. Next moment he rose abruptly, remarking that he felt chilled.

"It's been delightful," Bob told Todd, shaking hands with a grip that confirmed his words. "We must meet again." In an age of artificiality, it was refreshing to meet one who had nothing artificial in his composition, one who was just a primitive unspoiled human.

They passed the night at the cottage. Lewis had given Katie his promise to keep away when next she sang, and in his heart he knew that if he returned to town nothing on earth could save that promise from being broken. For that reason he discreetly put a space of five miles between himself and temptation. Moreover he yearned to have a whole long evening alone with Bob. For Bob was both

chum and mentor: chum in unreserved intimacy; mentor in sympathy, catholicity and wisdom. Actually he was little older than Lewis: in knowledge of the world he was by a thousand years the senior.

Cummy provided a high tea, Scots fashion, with a menu of cold chicken, cold ham, homemade scones, farls, cookies, a salad mostly tomato and hard-boiled egg, butter fresh from the churn, cream as rich as any in Devon, jam and a jar of honey—literally, as Bob declared, a feast for the gods. Cummy smiled wisely. Of the tastes of heathen gods she knew nothing and cared less; but she fancied she knew what was good for two young men with hill appetites. Tea over she immediately cleared the table and left them, as she explained, to keep an eye on a maid with a passion for dish-smashing. Privately she thought. "They'll hae their ain bits o' things to crack aboot." And she was right.

Wheeling chairs to the open window they stretched in careless ease.

"Now for digestion and a pipe," observed Bob. "Has heaven anything better for mortals than a keen appetite, delicious fare, an agreeable feeling of fatigue, an easy chair and My Lady Nicotine?"

"Not many," agreed Lewis, with one sharp mental reservation.

A long time they smoked in charmed silence, watching the shadows creeping up the hillsides.

"How stealthily night steals upon the land," remarked Bob. "There's still a green blaze on Caerketton's crest, the last little dazzling stand of day; but it's doomed. That's how things die."

"No need to be funereal about it," responded Lewis. "Rise early enough to-morrow morning and you'll see it

all blazing back to life again. And that, my son, is where nature has the advantage over man."

"Who's funereal now?" smiled Bob. "But 'tis true, and pity 'tis, 'tis true. There's an undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns. Poor devil."

"From which," rejoined Lewis cheerfully. "The wise will deduce a moral."

Bob nodded comprehendingly. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow—quite so. Like youth, happiness is a stuff that won't endure. Opportunities are things to be caught on the wing. Hullo! what's the matter?"

A clock chimed, and Lewis leaped into the air as if shot up by some sudden convulsive force behind.

"Nothing," he answered, a trifle lamely. "Only, well! She'll be singing now. This is her hour. Bob, think of it, singing to that beastly crew."

"I *have* thought of it," said Bob quietly. Lewis, who according to wont in moments of excitement, had begun to pace the room, halted, staring at him in surprise.

"You have, eh?"

"Yes. Jolly hard lines on a nice girl. Still, she'll have what most girls like—heaps of admirers—such as they are."

Lewis laughed with just the faintest suggestion of bitterness. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend. You don't mind rubbing it in, do you?"

Bob looked up quizzically. "Oh! as serious as that, eh? I imagined it was just——"

"Oh, no," interrupted Lewis. "Not serious, no, not at all. Just the sort of lame, lukewarm feeling Othello had about Desdemona, you know, or Antony for Cleopatra. Nothing more, I assure you." Then with a sudden change of tone. "I know what you're thinking, Bob,

what anybody, I suppose, would think, but it's wrong, utterly, unjustly wrong."

"Nothing of the *fille de joie* element?" said Bob.

"*Honi soit qui mal y pense,*" rejoined Lewis. "May the false thought perish."

"My dear fellow, no need to invoke curses. I have eyes, a trifle myopic at times, perhaps, but still capable of seeing the sun at noon. Hence my remark that I seem to see the glimmer of a motive in the young lady's behavior towards you. *Une fille de joie* doesn't run away from a prospective lover, so far as I know."

Lewis stared a moment; then in a flash of illumination he cried. "Bob, you're the very devil for cuteness. You've divined it, I believe. You're a wizard—and a generous one," he added with glowing conviction. Bob shook his head modestly.

"No," he corrected. "Only an interested observer of human nature, which is as wicked as hell and as noble as heaven: and alike in its vices and its virtues is most magnificently inconsistent. As with Egypt's immortal queen, age cannot wither nor custom stale its infinite variety. Wherefore I love it and try to understand it. *Voila tout, monsieur.*"

Lewis made a dart at his hand. "Worth ten thousand shrewish, puling moralists," he cried. "That's what you are. Yes, and another ten on top of that. With all its defects human nature is a miracle of goodness."

"The greatest on earth," quoth Bob. "Only you needn't crush my fingers to pulp."

There was a tap on the door and Cummy popped in her head. "Supper's ready in the next room," she announced. "Bless us a'," she cried in the next breath. "Sittin' in the dark like owls, as if there wasna a licht to

be got in a' Swanston. Just like men: so helpless. Come awa ben."

In going "ben" Lewis slipped an arm about her shoulders.

"You're a jewel, Cummy," he said affectionately and kissed her like a very lover.

"Think shame afore folk," cried the gratified Cummy, pretending to blush. "That's mainners. My certy, but you're no blate, and you needin' a shave. I'll hae to put cauld cream on the spot."

"Getting some of my own back," laughed Lewis. "How often have you taken advantage of me?"

"It's true," she owned, looking at Bob. "Many and many's the time I kissed him when he couldna help himsel, poor wee laddie. Now sit ye doon and I'll see whatna kind o' a mess ye've left in the other room. Likely there's a deal o' wasted cigarette ends."

It was a standing grievance with Cummy that Lewis could never be taught the elements of tidiness and economy in smoking.

After supper they returned to their easy chairs and their tobacco. Cummy, meanwhile having lighted a lamp and made the place "a bit tidier." Then on promise that they would not sit up "the lee lang night haverin'" she consented to go off to bed.

For some time Bob smoked like a miniature volcano: Lewis, sedulously twisting cigarettes and littering the floor with ash, ruminated at leisure. There were many important things on which he meant to get Bob's opinion. But they were mostly unpleasant. On second thoughts he dismissed the idea. No need to let grievances intrude. For the first time since reaching manhood they were

absolutely by themselves, and in all likelihood should never be so again. It was a chance to be seized with both hands.

Therefore, when presently the floodgates of talk were opened, they let themselves go on art, and literature till time and space were annihilated, and nothing in the whole wide world seemed worth while except to be a great painter and a great writer. And in the opulence of virgin imagination, the glorious optimism of youth, all things seemed possible—fame, fortune, the applause of men, the admiration of women, and best of all, a place in the Valhalla of the immortals.

Long afterwards, and amid strange and distant scenes, one at least of the twain was to recall those enchanted hours of vaulting ambitions in the rustic stillness of Swanston, with the silent night around and the silent stars overhead. Nor was he ever to forget how Katie was part of all his plans, or how eagerly, earnestly her face shone upon him. That memory was indelible, unforgettable. At last in a fever of enthusiasm he rose exclaiming:

"This has been a taste of Paradise, a night with the gods." Mechanically he drew aside the blind, and in the next breath called out in astonishment. "By Jove! the dawn."

Bob too rose and looked out. "The dawn for sure," he said. "Are you sleepy?"

"Sleepy," echoed Lewis. "Is a man sleepy when every nerve in his body is vibrating like a taut wire?"

"Then we are up early enough," said Bob. "Let's slip out and see the crest of Caerketton catch fire and come to life again."

"I'm your man," responded Lewis gleefully. "Come on."

They stole out stealthily as thieves, and through dew-

wet grass strode as for a wager. Suddenly Bob laid a hand on Lewis's arm.

"See," he said, almost with a gulp of awe. "See."

A golden shaft had shot out of the gray quivering East, right to the zenith, as if to shatter the forces of night at a stroke. Next minute, like a blazing halo, the rim of the sun came up flooding the horizon with light. They halted to watch.

"Sublime," murmured Bob.

"Sublime," repeated Lewis.

An in that enchanting, uplifting, awe-inspiring moment both understood how it was that their pagan ancestors were sun-worshippers.

They went on, noting how the shadows slunk downhill, as the evening before they had crept up. The shadows were routed. Life, joyous, exuberant, conquering was once more in possession of the world. A nameless exhilaration, partly the effect of that divine rejuvenescence, but mostly of more intimate causes, thrilled through Lewis. For there glowed in his heart the germ of a dream, long afterwards turned into song, of his love coming to meet him in the dawning and the dew. And the morning air was not sweeter, nor the sunlight fairer, nor the glistening dew drops purer than she.

It was a draggled, drenched pair that startled Cummy an hour or two later.

"Mercy on us," she cried, lifting her hands in horror at sight of them. "Mercy on us! twa tramps. What hae ye been up to now?"

"Only seeing the sun rise," Lewis told her. "You and I have done that together many a time, haven't we, Cummy?"

"Many a time," agreed Cummy. "But there should

be some pickle sense in a' things. It would hae suited ye better to be in your beds. And I was sent to take care o' ye. Oh! Lewis, Lewis, when will ye be wise?"

"In some happy future state when you and I consort in the Elysian fields," he answered. "Meanwhile, my dear, we're famishing."

"And nae wonder," retorted Cummy. "Nae wonder stravaigin' the hills a' night like a pair o' poachers. Weel! run in wi' ye and change yer feet. There's better jokes than catchin' cold."

And with that admonition she hustled off to prepare breakfast. Even naughty boys must be fed.

CHAPTER XVII

BY NOON Bob left on a series of visiting engagements in a Border County that would occupy him for a week, possibly longer. Lewis saw him off; then the train gone, he yawned vacantly, wondering what on earth to do with himself. Still hours of weary waiting and burning expectation.

There were several things he ought to do, and one thing in paritcular, as the clanging College bell reminded him, that horrid grating bell that set soul and teeth on edge. He turned away, shrugging his shoulders in revolt. Let it clang till it cracked. That day wild horses would not drag himself inside the University gates.

He had luncheon quietly with his mother, who was cheerful and not too inquisitive. After a cigarette, smoked with resolute vivacity by her side, he called at Bolem's tavern, collected the *disjecta membra* of the *Yellow Un,* carried them to the printer in a dingy close off the High Street, and, with a grand editorial air, instructed him to "go ahead and make up." The contents, he secretly regretted, were not ideal. Bob had omitted to write that sparkling, wicked article on "The Devil's Playground," and his own hand was but fractionally seen. Still why be depressed? Better luck next time, should next time ever come.

"That's the damn thing disposed of," he told himself, as he went off, calling a blithe, "Well! good-by. You'll buck up and do your best, won't you?"

"Ay, ay, I'll do my best," answered the printer. To himself he added, "It's the color of your money I want to see, my man."

The ways of amateur editors were trying, but more trying still, much more trying, was their lack of cash. Fortunately there was a father in the background, and for delays in payment a snug percentage could be worked in unostentatiously. Of that aspect of the matter the editorial staff, as he was well aware, was blissfully, beneficently ignorant.

As Lewis got into the street a military funeral was passing—a simple unimposing spectacle—three pipers leading abreast, their pipes wailing "The Land o' the Leal," the coffin on a gun-carriage, drawn by two horses: immediately behind it a boy-officer, clearly in love with his new uniform and his pretty looks; and following him a grizzled sergeant and a handful of men. The tartan was the striped dark green of the Black Watch.

Raising his hat Lewis stood a minute regarding the tiny procession. The dead man, he understood, was a private; hence the lack of pomp and circumstance in the obsequies. But the wail of the pipes and the slow measured step were strangely impressive. The Land o' the Leal! Was it really, he wondered, the land o' the leal for the dead man, the land of perpetual blessedness, so fondly painted by pious romantics, hoping for rewards they did not earn? Borne to his long home was he aware of this last bit of earthly pageantry. Was he pleased? was he disappointed or did he not care? It would be interesting to know and alas! idle to speculate. The man on the gun-carriage kept his secret; and the pipes went on lamenting, and a few old comrades stepped solemnly at regulation pace.

Presently the party would return swinging to the "Highland Laddie" or "The Girl I Left Behind Me," or other quick-step, the horses curvetting at a half-trot, to

indicate that another erring son of Adam had gone home and ta'en his wages, and should have neither part nor lot in anything under the sun any more for ever. Yet the sun shone and the world continued to wag with no sense or sign of loss. "What a queer mix up," thought Lewis. "What a meaningless phatasmagoria." How futile, how ludicrously, fantastically futile it all seemed, when one thought seriously. Yet the strange ironic thing fascinated, luring and luring and luring with endless cunning. That, he supposed, was where tragedy got its innings.

Two soldiers met the funeral party, halted an instant at the salute, and then resumed their walk, chatting indifferently. He had an impulse to speak to them: but in the same moment they turned aside and dived into what in effect was an underground tunnel. To his surprise they disappeared into a shooting-gallery which he knew, and without any motive whatever, save that of killing time, he followed them. They were there, he found, to enjoy the joke of settling a bet by three shots apiece at a target they could not miss. Lewis, gently amused, watched as the toy rifles cracked, and the scores were registered. Then the loser, who had not striven to win, laying down his rifle turned to him.

"Care to have a pot at the thing?" he asked affably. "A blind man could register a bull's eye every twist. No the rifle doesn't kick."

The attendant politely loaded for him, and he took aim and fired. A miss. A second time he fired and again a miss. "Dammit," he muttered: for the soldiers were chortling. With a third shot he just got the edge of the target.

"Quite possible, you see, to miss making a bull's eye,"

he laughed, throwing down his rifle. The soldiers chuckled good-humoredly.

"In pulling the trigger you jerked," one of them remarked. "In too big a hurry. Slow and steady's the rule in shooting—unless of course you're firing at the enemy: then it's quick and steady."

"So as to get your man before he gets you," said Lewis.

"Exactly," agreed the soldier. "Make a mistake there and ten to one you'll never have a chance of correcting it. It's domino."

They were pleasant, well-spoken fellows, and feeling friendly he asked whether they knew the man who had just gone by on the gun-carriage.

"Know him," answered one. "Fine that. A good chum and a good soldier, if he wasn't just so daft."

"And what particular form did his daftness take?" inquired Lewis.

The soldier made a motion as of taking off a glass of liquor. "That and the devil," he said succinctly.

"Drink and the devil in petticoats," observed the other. "Then clink and the Land o' the Leal."

"Oh!" said Lewis. So the man on the gun-carriage had felt ginger hot in the mouth, had loved and been loved, ate sour grapes and had his teeth set on edge. In some sort Lewis felt him a comrade.

The loser of the bet was to pay in beer, and being sociable invited his new acquaintance to share. But with a discretion for which he usually got no credit, Lewis made a polite excuse.

Ten minutes later he was gayly disputing with a divinity student over a social glass in a haunt near by, a private resort of 'Varsity men in seasons of thirst which

generally speaking were perennial. Having given six whole months to the study of theology and scored a pass mark in the terminal examination the divinity student felt himself armed cap-a-pie to meet the enemy in the gate. Lewis was not so much a brand to be plucked from the burning as a farceur to be covered with shame and confusion, in the midst of his levity, made in fact an awful example of the scoffer's fate over things he did not understand. Other students dropped in, singly or in pairs, to wash down the dust and grit of lectures, and, being subtle and eager disputants to a man, speedily turned the jest into a heated and clamorous debate, in which the hidden purposes of Providence were dragged to light, examined, analyzed, and made plain to the meanest understanding. In the process someone mentioned the invaluable services of Calvin.

"Ah!" cried Lewis, who had lately been dipping with avid zest into French skepticism. "Read Renan on that champion of humility."

"Renan," retorted the divinity student, conscious of delivering a blow straight from the shoulder, "is an infidel, and what is worse, a renegade."

"And Calvin, what do you call him?" cooed Lewis, with the softness which misleads.

"Next to St. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, the greatest man who ever lived," answered the divinity student, triumphantly.

"Slow and sentimental music," crooned an irreverent listener.

Lewis grimaced satirically. "The good Paul we can swallow, though by all accounts he was no beauty; in fact he is one of my own heroes. But Jean Calvin! No, no, my dear fellow, he won't go down. It won't do. The

Christian religion is tolerant, gentle; when or where did Monsieur Calvin ever exhibit the Christian virtues of tolerance or gentleness? As to his pretence of knowing the mind of the Almighty, bah! he knew no more of God's secrets than I do."

"And that's little enough," retorted the divinity student, who had not the gift of keeping his temper under raillery.

Lewis bowed with mocking courtesy. "And pray how much do you know? Just what you're told by some other pretender. And what is it your capacious, all digesting credulity takes on trust? Just what those drivellers tell you? And what do they know? Just what other drivellers told them. So the endless farce runs."

"Ah," said the divinity student, unable to find an immediate answer. And again, "Ah!"

"Tragic," continued Lewis urbanely. "They never thought for themselves: you never think for yourself. There isn't enough thought for a perishing sparrow among the lot of you, nor an original independent idea. You've been stuffing me with fables that were obsolete when Adam was born. You just go on chewing the same old straw till the poor old straw isn't even a straw any more, but a pulpy half-digested theological cud."

"Theological cud," echoed a familiar voice behind. "Good Lord! what fare for drouthy Christian folk."

Charlie had entered and at his breezy festive presence the debate dissolved in laughter. For Lewis the net result was—yet another enemy. Their number was mounting fast.

Presently the two friends went off together, untroubled by thoughts of creed or dogma. Outside Lewis's heart gave a tingling leap. The sun was dipping low in the

west. Already the foot of the castle-rock was in shadow, and wherever shadows could gather among Edinburgh's crags and chasms they were congregating. At last, at last, the interminable day was nearly done.

Then suddenly in the midst of his glee, a cold fear smote him. Often spying eyes made it difficult to keep secret engagements. At present his father was dourly suspicious. What if suspicion flared into arbitrary hostility, and the eagerly awaited tryst failed? That simply must not be. Yet how was the risk to be obviated? In the stress of excitement his brain was working with extraordinary rapidity, and in a flash his plan came to him.

"Charlie, old boy," he said. "Will you do me the favor of inviting me to supper with you to-night, and insisting that I accept?"

Charlie glanced at him, as in response to some hidden jest.

"I mean it," Lewis assured him. "Really. No codding." Frankly, and in a voice kinky from excitement he explained.

"The very thing I want," cried Charlie. "My compliments and I will be, no shall be, these demnition 'shalls' and 'wills' how they bother a Caledonian. Anglicè then, I shall be glad if you do me the honor of supping with me to-night at eight o'clock precisely—to meet yours truly. No refusal please."

Lewis gravely accepted the invitation, and that done the two laughed like born conspirators carrying off a grand coup.

"Eight o'clock then," said Lewis. "And no offence if I slope hurriedly at the supreme moment. Now, I must dutifully toddle home and report that I have been persuaded against my better judgment to accept an invitation

to supper. Ah! dear me, the guilefulness of man. See you at Philippi."

And he went off grinning.

Katie was prompt. As he was to find she did not make promises lightly. In the dim gloaming she seemed shy and timid, as one adventuring upon something dreadfully perilous, if not absolutely forbidden. Yet Lewis was sure she was glad to see him. How he actually felt over the conviction he could not have told, since all feeling, all thought was swallowed up in the ineffable sense of her presence. For a moment he was actually bashful. Somehow, he felt for the fiftieth time, she was not as other girls. He had never been bashful with them. The mystery of it made his heart throb.

"I thought our meeting would never come," he told her, in a sort of trembling ecstasy.

She smiled a little half-chiding smile. "It's only two days since we last met," she reminded him. "You mustn't be impatient."

"Two days," he echoed. "Two centuries, you mean. I never guessed what an ordeal it is to wait when every minute is an hour and every hour a week at least."

"I see you have the gift of exaggeration," she said, laughing softly.

"Only when I'm in love," he answered. "And then, you know, it isn't exaggeration; it's the truth. As a simple unvarnished fact I thought the time would never pass. It's been forty-eight hours of consuming fever."

"Exaggeration again," she returned. "Were you so very anxious that the time should pass quickly?" In the dusk he could not see that she flushed.

"Katie," he replied. "Tell me this. Is the famishing man anxious for food? Is the man dying of thirst anxious

for water? Is a man in torment anxious for relief? If not then I was not anxious."

"You are a very silly boy," she said, and in his ear her tone was pure enchantment. In the next breath she added in some agitation that people were watching and staring.

"Damn them," he cried, with sudden ferocity. "Why can't they mind their own business? But let's cheat them. I propose a more private walk."

"Not far," she warned him. "I can't go far."

They were wandering at random in a northern suburb, in the midst of fields and quiet lanes. Katie settled the question of direction.

"Oh! yonder's the mountains," she said, pointing to looming masses on the horizon. "Let us walk towards them—just to get a wee bittie nearer. They're so lovely, the shepherds and the dogs and the sheep and the peewits and the green glens and the running, leaping waters. Yet, and best of all, the kindly folk with the smiling faces. It would be heaven to be with them again."

She was quivering with sudden excitement, and had the light been better he would have seen there were tears in her eyes. He was tempted to ask why she had left them; but delicacy forbade. If she cared to tell, the information would be volunteered: if she did not care it was not for him to be impertinently inquisitive. Instead he harked back to her singing on the night before.

"It was unkind of you to keep me away," he told her. "But at the hour you may be sure I thought of you; in fact I could almost hear the applause though I was five miles away. There was plenty of it, I am sure."

"Oh! yes," she admitted. "But—but it was horrid."

"Horrid," he echoed. "Most girls would love it."

"Perhaps. I didn't."

Her tone indicated that she did not wish to pursue the subject, and he would not for worlds offend her. Nevertheless there was one question he could not help asking, even at the risk of seeming to be rude.

"And lots of sweethearts to see you home, I'll bet," he said.

She drew up sharply. "If you're going to be nasty we'll turn and go back," she told him, as he fancied, very decisively. Yet something impelled him to persist.

"Oh! don't take it like that," he rejoined. "Didn't anybody want to see you home?"

"I said that if you're going to be nasty we'll turn back," she repeated with increased emphasis.

"Anything but that, Katie," he returned. "You know I don't want to be nasty. But I'm right, am I not?"

For a minute they walked in silence: then very softly he asked. "Katie, have I offended you?"

Instead of answering she said, as under a sudden fierce impulse. "If you want to know, somebody did want to see me home."

"Didn't I guess it?" he cried, with a wild thrill of jealousy which surprised himself.

"Yes," she repeated, as if deliberately bent on rubbing it in. "Somebody was very anxious to see me home. There are always gallant gentlemen, oh! men are so gallant. So ready to take pity on a lonely girl."

She paused as if to take breath; then from between set teeth she added. "Last night I think I'd have torn the eyes out of any man who tried to molest me."

He was astonished and showed it.

"But why?" he asked. "Why would you have been so cruel?"

For a full minute she did not answer. Her face was

partly averted, so that he had only a side view of it: but he knew that she was shaking with emotion, he almost thought she was going to cry. Yet, as from no volition of his own he said:

"Won't you tell me, Katie?"

She kicked a dry twig on the road. "Because—because—oh! I can't tell you."

"Then don't dear. I had no right to ask. Forgive me." He spoke with unaffected tenderness.

"Then I will." The words came with a ring that was almost defiant. "Because—because I was thinking of you."

For an instant he scarcely dared to breathe lest he had not heard aright.

"Of me," he cried, with a dizzying throb of his whole being. "That—that was the reason. Katie, my darling."

Next moment she was crushed in his arms, her face uplifted to his. She did not resist; rather, he felt, she surrendered on a surge of elemental passion.

"She is mine," he thought in a giddy transport. "Mine, mine."

CHAPTER XVIII

ON A red-letter afternoon some days later Lewis and Katie took their seats in a lumbering horse-bus, plying between Edinburgh and Queensferry. Both were excited, with a guilty feeling of furtiveness, for the adventure was at once clandestine and dangerous. Katie had reluctantly raised objections to what in her heart she ardently desired. There would, she argued, be prying eyes and babbling tongues, with consequent trouble for Lewis. For herself she had no concern; she did not matter.

"So you pay me the fine compliment of thinking me a coward," Lewis responded. "Thank you warmly, miss."

"No—no," she protested. "But——"

"But me no buts," he interrupted, with a laugh. "Of course if it gets out neither of us will have a rag of reputation left. Then, my lass, you'll know what it is to shiver in the arctic wind of our blessed respectability, and oo! but it's cold."

He pretended to shudder. "Still let us be charitable. It would be unkind to deprive scandal-mongers of the chance of a prize scandal. So, my dear, unless you're afraid, we go."

"You are very daring," she said, her eyes glowing.

"In the matter of enjoyment there is one infallible rule," he explained blithely. "Make sure of your cake by eating it. Then even Fate herself can't cheat you. I try to act on that admirable principle."

Trembling in fear and gladness Katie consented. But as they trundled heavily away at a snail's gallop, as Lewis impatiently expressed it, her heart beat hard and quick, for at any moment spies might appear. It was a relief

when they reached Cramond Brig, three miles out, and alighted. So far they had escaped attention.

"Well! that's that," said Lewis, as the bus rumbled on. "Here we are all to ourselves. Let's thank whatever gods may be and make the most of it."

"And it's so interesting," observed Katie, recalling her studies in history. "It was on this very spot that the Highland Spae Wife warned James the First to turn his horse about and ride back the way he came. You know Rossetti's poem on it."

He regarded her with a look of quick astonishment.

"Rossetti's poem," he said. "You know Rossetti's poems?"

"Some of them. And I like that one most of all, I think."

"How does it go?" he asked, wondering at this new revelation.

"Like this." And in a low voice, which seemed to him the very soul of music, she repeated:

> And the woman held his eyes with her eyes.
> O King! thou art come at last:
> But thy wraith has haunted the Scottish sea
> To my sight for four years past.

"You wonderful girl," he cried in delight. "You wonderful girl. Why, you know more of the history and romance of Scotland than I do, and more poetry as well."

She shook her head, smiling and blushing at his enthusiasm. "No, no I'm very ignorant. I just happened to remember, that's all."

"Can't remember what you didn't know," rejoined Lewis crisply. "I'm going to call you my Highland Wonder."

Here was a new interest, a new bond. Most decidedly

Katie was different from all the other girls he knew. Possibly she was a poetess herself. Looking at her he thought of Sappho, who, as somebody said, was passion set to music. And Katie, too, could set passion to music She had done it with transporting effect.

"Let us walk on," he said, in a new-found glow. "Only before we go further I have a favor to ask. As I call you Katie, so will you call me Lewis? Let me hear you say it."

"Lew-is," she repeated, prolonging the sound like a note in music. "Lew-is."

"Lovely," he cried, taking her arm and pressing it. "Ay, and more than lovely. Say it always just like that. Now, what's to be our route? Say where."

"Where we can have a good view," she answered. "I want to see the hills."

They found a secluded path through the woods by the haunted Almond Water. Then ascending a little height, a knoll placed in the woodland as for purposes of observation, they sat down side by side on a mossy tree trunk blown down by the wind. It was a setting for happy lovers. The sky, unusually high to-day, was a pellucid, almost Italian blue; the sunlight was golden clear, the air like the wafted breath of a censor; and about their feet, as if silently craving notice, a wealth of bluebells, primroses and hearts-tongue ferns. Every copse was a choir of jubilant birds; below them gleamed and shimmered the Forth with its tiny islands: behind the smoke of Edinburgh hung like an illumined haze, and north and west were the shining mountains.

Katie's eyes were fastened on the north.

"Lovely," she breathed, as if speaking to herself. "Aren't they beautiful, even at this distance."

"Yes," he agreed. "Very beautiful, mostly by suggestion though, by what you put into them."

"And isn't it always just like that, with beautiful things?" she returned, her eyes still far away.

"No," he replied emphatically. "Not always. You are beautiful, Katie, and it isn't anything on my part that makes you so."

"You must not be silly," she retorted, with a sudden, divine crimsoning. "If I thought you brought me out here just to say flattering things I wouldn't have come. Now be a good boy and talk sense to me—Lew-is. Tell me all about the places we see from here."

She tucked in her skirts and indicated that she was waiting.

"If I'm to be guide in this little outing," he returned, smiling into her face, "I demand payment in advance. Understand that in this business I am most frightfully mercenary, an absolute Shylock in love."

She leaned toward him with the unabashed frankness of a child. "There. Now please go on. I like to hear about the places and things."

Her tone, her look told him she was very happy.

"On second thoughts suppose you be a good girl and talk to me," he said. "I believe you know more than I do. Over at the bridge you mentioned King James and the Spae Wife. Do you believe in Spae Wives?"

"Yes," she replied, simply and seriously.

"Have you ever known one?" he asked with quickened interest.

"I knew an old woman who had the second sight," she answered, as he thought with a touch of awe.

"Genuine?" And as she nodded, "Tell me about her.

Did she see into the future and tell you what was going to happen to you, and all that sort of stuff?"

"Yes. It gives me the gooseflesh to think of it. Have you ever met a Spae Wife?"

"Once." Katie sat up as with a start.

"And—and did she tell you things about yourself?"

"A whole heap of things," he answered. "I was vastly amused. They're really very ingenious in making up their rigmaroles."

"It's very wonderful how they know the truth," corrected Katie gravely. After a pause. "Maybe you'll tell me what she said. Was she Highland?"

"As Highland as they're made: and among the many things she told me was this, that I am to be a wanderer."

"A wanderer," repeated Katie, as it seemed on a note of anxiety. "A wanderer?"

"So she informed me—after consulting the oracles. It was almost like the mysteries of Delphi, and she a smoke-dried priestess with the sacred odor of peat-reek. It seems I am to cross pretty nearly all the seas of the world, and live and die among strange, savage people, far, far from home. Not much sign of it now, eh?" he ended with a laugh.

"Oh! we never know, we never know," she said with an emotion that surprised him. "And Spae Wives are very wise. God tells them things."

"Why," he cried, "you don't mean to say you really believe their stuff?"

"I have just told you that I do, replied Katie, in gentle reproof. "Has any of the things she told you come true?"

"They were so unlikely that I made haste to forget most of them," he replied with a whimsical air. "Besides

some of them weren't exactly exhilarating. But I remember one thing she said which has come true."

"Oh!" said Katie. "Then you should believe."

"I do believe that, because it is the truth. She said I was to meet a very, very lovely girl and that she'd steal my heart. That has happened."

"Oh!" said Katie again, with a perceptible flush.

"I'll just describe her to you," said Lewis. "So that you may have an idea what sort of a girl she is."

She sat with her eyes on his face, and feature by feature, charm by charm he described the girl before him.

"Oh," she cried, in a glowing crimson, when he had finished. "You are just making all that up."

"I am reporting truthfully, as God sees me," he replied warmly. Then moving a little closer. "Katie, if it should happen that the Spae Wife was right: if I am to be banished, to be an exile, as may well happen, will you go with me?"

For half a second she stared at him: then with a swift catch of the breath she answered, "Oh! but you wouldn't want me—Lew-is."

He caught her hand; his own was trembling, but it seemed stolidly unmoved besides hers.

"Believe me when I say there is nothing else in all the world I want so much as you, Katie," he declared with sudden passion. "If I have to go will you go with me?"

"I could go to the end of the world with you," she replied, panting a little. "But, my dear——"

With a dizzying throb he drew her toward him, and for one tense moment there was silence. Then half shyly she drew a little away from him.

"Oh! listen to that bird," she cried, not yet quite mistress of herself. "There's singing for you."

On a bough above their heads a tiny, speckle-throated singer sat alone, pouring out his heart with infectious rapture. "Isn't he happy," she added.

"Overflowing," agreed Lewis. "But I know one who is happier still, only, poor devil, he can't sing his happiness. This is a day of days, my own. I wish it could last forever."

She looked down, rubbing the turf with her foot. "Happy things don't last," she said in a low voice.

"Depends a good deal on ourselves, doesn't it?" he observed. "We can make them last more or less if we try hard enough. Most people haven't the sense to be happy even when they get the chance. But we will, won't we Katie?"

She lifted her head and looked at him. The glow in his eyes, telling more than words could express, brought a responsive glow to her own. Then suddenly, as if an icy blast struck her, she shuddered. Something the Spae Wife had said came back, curdling her blood.

"There are things that cannot be done," she said enigmatically. And with that she rose abruptly, saying it was time to return.

He protested vehemently, and for answer she pointed to the westering sun.

"Besides you'll be wanting your tea," she said, descending plump to the commonplace.

"Which means that my lady wants hers," he remarked. "Well! I'm sorry that the social amenities do not extend to this sylvan solitude. Yet the resources of civilization are not exhausted." He grinned. "What do you say to this?"

He took from his pocket a small parcel neatly done up in tissue paper.

"Sandwiches," she cried, her face lighting with new interest.

"Yes, and they've got to be eaten. Please sit down. Creature comforts are sweet necessities, my dear. Your mention of tea has made me feel mighty peckish."

She sat down again, laughing as over a rare adventure, and together, hungry as children at a picnic, they demolished the sandwiches.

"They're delicious," declared Katie, munching with immense relish.

"Specially prepared under the owner's personal supervision," said Lewis, his mouth uncomfortably full. But he did not tell her that they were surreptitiously made by Cummy under promise of eternal secrecy.

"I'm as bad as you," Cummy had told him striving, with indifferent success, to stifle conscience for sake of her boy. "Just fair leadin' me astray, that's what you're doin' and me an old woman, forby bein' releegious. Lewis, my lamb, we'll get our fairin' for this. There off wi' ye or we'll be catched." And in the darkness of the pantry she stuffed the sandwiches into his pocket.

They finished their alfresco feast in a burst of boy and girl merriment; then with a largess of crumbs Katie fed the birds, which in response to seductive cooings and cheepings came hopping and pecking almost within touch of her hand.

"Katie," said Lewis, watching in fascination. "Another o' your accomplishments—bird lore. What next?"

"I love birds," she replied, letting a trickle of ground bread filter through her fingers. "That's a little windfall they didn't expect, so they're all the more delighted. There's nothing like a pleasant surprise. Oh! just see

how they cock their heads for more, as if they were all Oliver Twists. Aren't they cute?"

"As cute as anything in nature," agreed Lewis cordially. "And most joyously astonished to meet a human being who is not out to rob or kill. Poor little beggars, I daresay they find it pretty hard to pick up a decent living. But will my lady listen? After all it wasn't for a benevolent study of birds I invited her out here."

She laughed lightly, said something about the sin of selfishness, and reminded him that he was to be a good boy, talk to her sensibly and tell her the names of places within view.

"'Tother way about, my Queen," responded Lewis. "How soon a girl forgets her promise."

"A girl never forgets her promises," she retorted.

"Just conveniently lets them slide," observed Lewis, his eyes twinkling.

She repudiated that charge also. "Very well!" he rejoined. "You were to tell me about the Highlands, weren't you? By the way, do you speak Gaelic?"

She nodded. "Let me hear you," he said.

Gravely, but with her eyes sparkling, she spoke a sentence.

"Hebrew to me," commented Lewis. "What does it mean?"

"That it's a lovely day and I am enjoying myself very much," she answered.

He bowed ceremoniously. "Thank you. Now some more."

She obeyed, and again translated. He asked for still more, and she complied. But when there was no response she pretended to sigh. "Oh! dear! I might as well be

speaking to that tree. How stupid men are. I asked you for a kiss and you just stare."

Laughing provokingly she sprang to her feet. Instantly he was up after her, and, in his excitement tripped and fell heavily. Immediately she was on her knees beside him. "It was my fault," she said in real concern. "Are you hurt?"

He held up a grazed hand from which blood was beginning to ooze.

"I'm so sorry, Lewis," she murmured, and he thought he had never heard so sweet a sound. "You fell on a broken stump, my dear. Wait, don't stir."

Quick as lightning she plucked his handkerchief from his jacket pocket and folded it with nimble, trained fingers.

"Now, give me your hand," she said. Dexterously and scientifically she bound the wound. "There, that will keep it right for a little while. When you get home, wash it, put on some boracic ointment and have it bound up again. The great thing is to keep it clean."

"That's delightful," he said, smiling up at her. "May I always have such a nurse. Now, upon my honor, I think you owe me that kiss."

Without a word she bent and the wounded hand clutched tightly.

"Now," she said, rising and helping him to his feet. "Really and truly we must go."

. . . . .

In the dusk they parted at a spot on the outskirts of the city, chosen by Katie. Lewis vehemently urged objections to such a dismissal but Katie was insistent and her wish was law.

"And I want to tell you," she said on a deep breath,

"how perfectly lovely it has been to-day; lovelier than I can tell."

"Let us make it the first of many such days," he told her. "To me, too, it was sweeter than I can tell. And you know, Katie, what thoughts I carry away. To-night I shall be dreaming for sure, sweetheart of mine."

She did not answer, though an answer that would have intoxicated him, sprang to her lips. After a tense pause she simply said:

"Now, my dear, you must leave me. There, I'll just wait and see you going."

He tore himself away. At a corner he turned, waving his hat, and she kissed her hand to him, smiling as though he could see her face. He passed out of sight, and she stood still; but the smile had vanished. All at once a dense, cold cloud seemed to envelop her, cutting her off, as by a great gulf, from all that was dear and warm and precious. The momentary happiness was but a gleam in the night come to tantalize her and leave her world darker than before. For several minutes she remained, motionless as a statue: then suddenly, as under some overwhelming emotion, she broke into a paroxysm of sobbing.

CHAPTER XIX

OF A sudden Lewis became aware that his affairs were going distressingly, disastrously awry.

"What an infernal mess," he reflected, contemplating the perversities of fortune. "And of course it never rains but it pours. The damn things must come in an avalanche." And of course the avalanche came at the wrong time; it is the way of avalanches.

He felt as if some malevolent sprite behind the scenes were indulging in a piece of satirical comedy at his expense, only he could find no amusement in the performance. When things get maddeningly entangled, and you are made the plaything of a malign Fate, your sense of the comic is apt to lose the keen edge of appreciation.

Though not ostensibly the most important, Katie was by far the most intimate, acute cause of commotion. She had made the great confession. Nestling in his arms she had murmured the magic words, "I love you, I love you," and held him as one holds what is dearest, sweetest, most precious in all the world. He could never forget the ecstasy of that moment, and he never did. The time was coming when the memory of it was to mean a pang of passionate regret that was as a stab in the heart. For the present he went about secretly repeating, like an enchanting strain of music, "Katie loves me, Katie loves me."

Then in sudden panic Katie took fright at her own surrender, her own unwarranted clutching at happiness.

"I mustn't, I mustn't," she cried piteously. "It isn't for me to love you or you to love me."

He argued, protested, implored. She merely shook her head, reiterating tragically as one who renounces all:

"No, no, we mustn't. Oh! my dear, oh! Lewis."

She was still in that mood, still balanced dizzily between "I would" and "I dare not." And it was for his sake she dared not.

Moreover while he was thus fevered, almost to semi-delirium, there came the avalanche of other things to irritate, torment, depress, drive to distraction—several interviews with his father, each worse than the one before, a heart-rending appeal from his mother, an attack of angry, tearful affection from Cummy. It was all like brine on the raw.

He longed for the return of Bob. Bob was always a light in the darkness, a tonic in time of need. Even Charlie was off on holiday, Charlie who played Sancho Panza to his Don Quixote with so touching and steadfast a devotion. Charlie was the ideal slow-footed, prosaic, matter-of-fact squire, who never mistook windmills for giants nor thought every casual wench a peerless Dulcinea. Invaluable to a quixotic knight. But Bob's was the head for a crisis. For to sympathy Bob added courage, knowledge, understanding and a wisdom in counsel not unworthy of Penelope's ingenious far-famed husband.

He returned at the end of a fortnight, bronzed, enthusiastic, overflowing with schemes of ambition. All possibilities of art, he discovered, were not confined to London, Paris, and Fontainebleau.

"You wait," he cried in bubbling ardor. "One of these days you'll see the Scottish border on canvas in all its gray, impressive grandeur. Scotland is magnificent, if only she were a little more civilized. She has no art. Be it ours, my boy, to hold the mirror up and let her see her own beauty, her own soul."

"Impossible," growled Lewis. "You can't show what doesn't exist. She has no beauty and no soul. She's

just what Mr. Carlyle calls a patent digesting machine. Provender, endless troughs of pig-swill, that's her exalted ideal. In Mr. Browning's elegant words, it's gir-r-r you swine. Them's my present sentiments."

Bob looked at him sharply.

"Hullo, hullo," he cried with an amused laugh. "What's the trouble? Is it liver, or can it by any chance be conscience?"

"Hell," replied Lewis succinctly.

"Then it must be an Eskimo hell," observed Bob. "Ice, ice, eternal ice. And indeed the atmosphere is chilly. In fact I'm shivering. Seems to me the sun never ventures out here without the precaution of throwing a blanket about his shoulders for fear of catching cold."

"Don't plagiarize from Heine," retorted Lewis. "Well! call it cold feet, say I'm funking."

"Too much even for my credulity," responded Bob cheerfully. "But prithee what's up?"

In half a dozen pungent sentences Lewis stated the bare, cardinal facts of the situation.

"Ah!" said Bob. "Umph! I see. A seething witches' cauldron with love, religion, and business as ingredients; a pretty brew, I'll admit."

"Too serious for jesting," said Lewis gloomily. "Maybe you can suggest a remedy."

Bob saw that he was in one of his rare moods of gravity; and inferred the position must really be grave.

"At your service," he replied. "And since hunger is fundamental with man, let us take ways and means first. You don't forget, I hope, that you were born an engineer?"

"A major part of the trouble," answered Lewis, rising and beginning to pace the floor.

They were in Bob's hotel bedroom. For being a true

blue Bohemian, Bob preferred the easy freedom of a third-rate hotel behind Princes Street to the fussy, inquisitive, irksome hospitality of friends or relatives.

"Born to an inheritance of lighthouses, as others are born to soap, or coal, or blacking—or beef or beer," Bob remarked. "Now if it's a fair question what are you kicking about? It's a noble idea, isn't it? to cheat the insatiable maw of the sea, to supplement 'Thus far and no further' with 'Thy fangs shall be robbed of their terror, thy savagery made manifest, so that sailor folk may pass on in safety.' Works of utility of a pretty high order, eh?"

"Granted," rejoined Lewis, "for a born engineer. Unhappily the mere accident of birth hasn't made me one."

"Sit down," said Bob. "We can talk best seated. So. Now, consider, my son. Two generations of adventurous, provident, foreseeing progenitors have laid out and smoothed a track for you. It's as much part of the family purpose you should tread their path—and many would envy you the chance—as that you should sleep, eat, dress, go to church and swallow with docile readiness the "Institutes" of Monsieur Jean Calvin. It's all in the plan."

"Quite so," agreed Lewis. "But not in my plan. That makes a considerable difference, doesn't it?"

Bob easily diagnosed the root cause of trouble. Youth kicking furiously against the pricks, and getting bruised and wounded in the process. Young men and maidens think, wonder, explore, question, adventure, till, suddenly they are brought up, like riotous colts thrown on their haunches. Bob mentioned these things, coupled with a warning.

"You insist on thinking and acting for yourself," he

observed with Socratic mien. "Well and good. Only take care not to overdo it. Let me indulge in the luxury of a platitude by reminding you that of all earthly things thought is the most dangerous. God alone knows what it may lead to. An idea in the cracked brain of Jean Jacques Rousseau started the French Revolution. Other ideas in other cracked brains started other revolutions and drenched the world in blood. Britain will be lucky if an idea in the cracked brain of some future fanatic does not set her institutions on fire."

"God hasten the canflagration," cried Lewis wickedly. "It's by the burning of old rubbish that men attain health and freedom. We need a blaze and a big 'un. Just at present we're stuck in the mud."

"And very, very comfortable," replied Bob. "That, my son, is why every properly constituted society is tacitly banded for thought-suppression. If you want to be a martyr think. Socrates thought: Jesus Christ thought. You know what happened to them."

"Well?" said Lewis.

"Oh! just this," answered Bob. "Don't think unless, well—unless you must and can't help it."

"And then?" queried Lewis, his pulses beating more quickly.

"Then by all that's sacred go ahead and let nothing stop you," was the emphatic reply.

Lewis's heart gave a bounding leap.

"Regardless of cost?"

"Regardless of cost. He who hesitates over cost in a great enterprise is lost. The world is for him who boldly puts out his hand, seizes and takes what he wants. That's the law and the prophets, and there is no other wisdom. And Lord! homilies are dry things. I'm parched. Let's

have something to drink, something French, if possible. Then you'll cut in, if you like."

With difficulty they got something French, and it was over a modest bottle of *Vin Ordinaire* in a shabby back room up three flights of stairs that Lewis opened his heart and revealed to Bob secrets carefully hidden from all Edinburgh.

"And they're leagued against you," Bob remarked on a hard breath when the tale of frustrated or hindered ambition was told. "What's come over the once glorious Modern Athens? Are all her ancient lights extinguished, all her literary gods dead?"

"Dead as the dodo," answered Lewis. "Instead of breeding and cherishing men of genius as of yore, she has declined upon parochial journalists and piddling antiquaries, with a sprinkling of self-conceited dabblers, by courtesy called literary, who swim with fatuous complacency in oceans of twaddle. Not one of the whole pretentious lot knows the ABC of writing."

"Therefore there's no inspiration or incitement," said Bob. "Never mind. *Nous allons changer tout cela.* Fools and dullards haven't yet succeeded in putting out the sun. Go right ahead. Anything particular on the stocks?"

Lewis laughed grimly. "Oh! a few experimental trifles, some essays, rather on the model of Lamb than the blustering Christopher North, a poem or two, a bludgy pirate yarn hideous with gore, a picaresque romance fit to make your hair curl, and a love story beside which 'Romeo and Juliet' is mere pap for babes."

Bob gave a whoop of delight.

"That's the stuff for the stolid Briton. Couldn't it be worked in with engineering?"

"Oh!" replied Lewis. "I thought I told you, that's off."

Bob whistled in amazement.

"Off. You mean you've really and truly chucked it? What does the pater say?"

"Say," echoed Lewis. "What he says would be quite unfit for your chaste ears, even if I could remember the half of it, which I can't. Never dreamed he had such a gift of lurid language. Upon my word, I almost admire and envy him."

"Well?" said Bob, his eyes still full of astonishment.

"The usual thing," continued Lewis. "We fought it out and then—compromised. As a sort of second best I'm to shine in the Law. I'm to tread the well-worn pavement of the Parliament House—if ever I get there."

"And mount the Bench," observed Bob. "A judge in the family would be——"

"Quite respectable," Lewis chipped in. "President of the Court of Session, a hard drinker, a gross jester, a pillar of respectability, a terror to evil-doers. Presto! Solomon in all his glory dispensing justice and wisdom. Magnificent. Failing that there's always the crib of Sheriff-Substitute in the outer Hebrides as a reward for legal preëminence and social righteousness." He laughed riotously.

"Nice soft job," said Bob. "Leave you plenty of time to flirt with the muses."

"I thought," returned Lewis severely, "you understood that authorship is anathema in my select circle. Nothing so low down as literature for us. It's chuck it or starve.'

"And it isn't pleasant to starve even for an ideal,"

remarked Bob gravely. "Of all crowns the martyr's is the hardest to wear."

"No ambition that way," laughed Lewis. "But literary aspirations aren't my worst crime. The news may not have reached Paris: but here it is current knowledge that I am a notoriously wicked person. For instance I frequent Bolem's tavern."

On that point Bob had something to say. He visualized the leering porcine faces, gross, sottish, with vice and drunkenness, and the lewd mirth of slinking hypocrisy. But for the present he contented himself by asking simply:

"Why do you go there, Louis?"

"He jests at scars who never felt a wound," was the enigmatic reply. "Why do I go there? Well! I'll tell you. As some wiseacre has quite correctly observed man is a gregarious animal. He has sociable instincts, poor beast. Do you twig?"

"You go for company?" said Bob, with a touch of pity.

"I go for company," agreed Lewis. "For solace, for human intercourse. No, not for liquor, though that comes in incidentally. It's low, vilely low, but it's human —for the most part. Its grossness is often nauseating, and its banality, its soaked, befogged native stupidity beggars description. Per contra it is warm hearted and companionable—in the main. And for me," he added with a thrill of defiance in his voice, "it has this prime, this inestimable advantage, that it lifts me clean out of the gloom of Tartarus, makes me forget naggings, reproaches, threats, tears, entreaties, and a whole infernal lot of things besides."

"Don't think I am whining, Bob," he continued, with an apologetic look, "or trying to justify my misdeeds.

Lord knows my sins are many and scarlet. I have met Satan and gone a-maying in his gay Arcadia. I'm much worse than my critics know, and also, thank God, much better. And, well!" he shrugged his shoulders with that French trick of his. "Dammit all you know, the patience of Job gave out at last. Listen, *mon cher,* if Dante chanced to visit this beautiful city he'd immediately add another circle to his hell—and a worse."

He laughed harshly. Bob was curiously, meditatively quiet.

"Puck fettered and kicking," he thought, a wave of pity sweeping over him. He knew that Louis was not blameless, far from it, that even the artist, flouting convention, wins victory through discipline, through self-mastery which is the pivot of all great achievement. Louis was rather like a man wantonly flaunting a red flag in the face of a bull. But the conditions were hard, cruel, exasperating. Edinburgh was too dull, too censorious to perceive that it was crushing a gift which, nurtured and encouraged, might bear imperishable fruit. Alas! for the blindness, and stupidity of men. Still intent on his tale Lewis went on.

"Then again as copestone to my crimes I am exhibiting a horrible, shocking taste in my love affairs. Bluntly put, it seems that compared with me Don Juan was a most reputable young gentleman, indeed a model of stainless virtue. To me, sir, belongs the distinction of setting a new standard of depravity. Congratulate me: for it's eclipse first and the rest nowhere."

"*C'est magnifique,*" cried Bob with sudden enthusiasm. "And I foresee more wonders to come. I prophesy a grand apotheosis when all the fluttering old maids will be doting on you, their vestal bosoms athrob with thoughts of all they

missed by not enjoying your distinguished gallantries. Oh! I see it all. You'll be the darling of virgin bowers, the ineffable delight of chaste tea tables. Who then shall dare to hint ginger was ever hot in your mouth?"

Lewis pretended to groan.

"Oh! Lord! Throw in curates and maiden aunts; anoint me and set me in the pulpit: make me the theme of admiration with preachers: label me Paragon and be done with it."

"Even that may come to pass," quoth Bob gravely. "In fact methinks I see a golden-haloed figure on a pedestal of ivory and alabaster, with the devout prostrate before it in homage. Glorious Apollo. Don Juan canonized.[1] Only as a preliminary you'll probably have to go through the little formality of dying. That's where the Immortals get in their bit of satire. Roses on the coffin: incense on the head of the laurelled statue. You won't know yourself. Well! go ahead with the tale of present iniquity."

Lewis guffawed.

"You do me 'andsome, you do. It'll be great fun to revisit the glimpses of the moon and behold my counterfeit presentment, very much counterfeit, by the way. Hear the last item then, and I'm afraid it bears rather hard on you as a prophet. All other things might be forgiven me, but not this. I'm out with religion. I'm not sure how I stand, whether I am a simple heretic, a sceptic, an agnostic, a full blown infidel or the whole lot together. Anyway it's damnation."

Bob's eyes twinkled. "Poor soul," he grinned. "Well?"

"On that score I have one question to ask," said

[1] Clearly Bob had the gift of prophecy. It is even as he foretold.

Lewis. "Are we to suppose that God is a deliberate and malignant satirist, that in the exercise of omnipotence he creates us just for the sport of planning our torments and gloating over them? If so what becomes of the God of love?"

"Abolished," said Bob. "Calvin and his little crew haven't much use for Him. Rather condemns Calvinism, to my mind."

"And mark you," continued Lewis with some warmth. "We come upon this little stage by no will or consent of our own. If we knew all and had free choice most of us, I daresay, would decline the adventure on the ground that the game is not worth the candle. But we're not consulted."

"No," agreed Bob. "More's the pity."

"Quite so. We're thrust into the world neck and crop with never a 'by your leave.' Very well, does the divine purpose predestine us to persecution and wretchedness? If so I repudiate the Providence that could be so calculatingly, callously cruel. There'd I be with Milton's Lucifer. But the idea is too horrible, except to the grim, bloodthirsty lot who regard the Deity as an everlasting implacable avenger. An avenger of what? Of the work of his own hands. Away with such a doctrine. It's a lie and a libel on the Creator. I am tired of the Deity of theologians. I believe, and I'll stick to it, that God means us to be happy, not miserable, and that's why I do my best to pick up whatever unconsidered trifles of enjoyment I can by the way."

"Which being interpreted means that the sinner feels no penitence," smiled Bob.

"Penitence," echoed Lewis. "Bob, they may break me: they shall never bend me. I have made certain resolutions and I carry them out or die, one or the other."

He sprang to his feet as on wires, his face flushed, his eyes glowing.

"Don't imagine I haven't thought all this out," he went on, looking down on Bob. "I have thought of it till my head reeled. And by much searching I have found out wisdom—which is this—that we make the mistake of taking fools and self-constituted judges too seriously. Even Paris falls into that error, and the irony of Voltaire, of Heine, of Renan does not save her. We make life too much like a funeral procession, with halts to consume funeral baked meats. Our harps are set to dirges, what my Lord St. Albans calls hearse-like airs. We ought to remember there are such things as carols. Instead we look glum, fret, wrangle, scold, fall out, and about what? Whether we should say tweedledum or tweedledee. Balzac's "Comedie Humaine" in weepers, a grotesque spectacle."

He laughed, took a swift turn about the room and halted before Bob.

"Since it's turned up I'll give you my philosophy in a nutshell. Here it is in four compact lines."

And with an impressive air he declaimed:

> I did not make the universe, so why
> To keep its regulations must I try?
> Hell fire's the price, they say. I'll have my fling,
> Then sportsmanlike I'll take the reckoning.

No whining Bob. That's me, take me or leave me."

Bob leaped to his feet and seized Lewis's hand.

"To thine own self be true," he cried. "*A votre santé.* That manly credo deserves a toast in something more sparkling than *Vin Ordinaire.*"

And with great gusto he rang the bell.

CHAPTER XX

LEWIS was early afoot next morning, with a tingling sense, bravely dissembled, of something exciting, if not portentous, in the wind. Immediately after breakfast he sought out Cummy. Next to his mother, who kept the privy purse and dispensed bounties, Cummy was his chief domestic ally.

"And what are ye for wantin' now?" she asked, eyeing him with affected severity. "Comin' botherin' and hinderin' a body first thing in the mornin'."

He explained meekly that to-day he had great business on hand and had come to enlist her invaluable, most profoundly appreciated aid. His cousin Bob from Paris and he had arranged a little outing and would she kindly make up the choicest luncheon basket her pantry could provide; something dainty that would not discredit her own high reputation or offend a delicate, cultivated Parisian taste?

"You know," he remarked encouragingly. "They're great cooks and caterers in France."

"Ay," returned Cummy dryly. "I mind their braggin', though 'deed I wasna in love wi' their cookin' when you and I were owre there. Ye were a wee bit laddie then. Fried frogs and snails nae less; that was their cookin'. Weel! us poor Scotch folk hae to put up wi' haggis, and porridge wi' an orra drap whisky. Howsomever," she added, "ilka ane to his taste, as the cormorant said when it swallowed the bag o' nails. We maun do our best for cousin Bob. He's a fine set up young man, though the way he looks at ye is whiles upsettin'."

"Oh! that's because he's an artist," Lewis explained

lightly. "Always on the lookout for striking faces, you know; studies them to see if they're worth painting."

"The Lord preserve us," cried Cummy in alarm. "He's no after my face, is he? For 'deed Lewis, dear, it's no' the face for pentin', if my gless tells the truth."

"It's character he wants," Lewis told her. "Something strong and distinctive, and he'd travel a long day's journey without seeing a finer face than yours, Cummy, my dear."

"Gae awa wi' ye," cried Cummy, smiling and almost blushing. "Think shame! flatterin' me at my age. I'm owre auld, laddie, forby bein' your nurse. Let him pent yer Highland lassie for ye. She's young and bonnie, and would look real weel in a pictir."

They were busy in the pantry. She glanced up from her sandwich cutting with a sly, sidelong look.

"Hae ye been seein' much o' her since you sang me a song in her praise?" she asked.

"A little, Cummy," he answered. "A very little. Not a tenth part as much as I'd like."

"They say love's hard to bide," remarked Cummy significantly, and went on cutting sandwiches. She called them "sangwiches," and observed that Bob, being a Paris swell, would probably prefer them "fine and thin. Snodlike, ye ken, and genteel aboot the edges."

To pass the time Lewis inquired casually whether any fresh news was going round.

"Oh! there's aye enough to keep tongues waggin'," replied Cummy. "I was at the prayer-meetin' again. Now, a bit cress would be tasty, I'm thinkin', if we had it; but never mind. Them that takes what they have never wants. Cold boiled ham and hard-boiled eggs, with good

bread and butter is no' that bad even for a Frenchy. Maybe Bob doesna care for frogs and snails."

She paused, viewing her neat pile with the complacency of an artist.

"Are ye like to be very hungry, d'ye think?" she inquired.

"Sure to be," answered Lewis, who had private and particular reasons for securing generous supplies.

"I jalouse theres some ploy in the wind," said Cummy, with a sage look. "Weel! what d'ye say to a bit o' cold chicken? Ay, that makes ye smack yer lips. Weel! as I was sayin' I was at the prayer-meetin'. Ye should hae been there. It was fine. Text, Proverbs seventh, ninth, tenth, and eleventh. A bonnie chicken this. It'll just melt in yer mooth like curded cream."

"I forget the passage," said Lewis. "No doubt it is very fit. What does it say?"

"It's a kind o' warnin' aboot the lasses," replied Cummy. All at once she drew in her breath with a gasp. "There I was nearly snippin' off my finger wi' yer jabberin'. It seems folk were just as daft in the days o' Solomon as they are now. But you can read the thing for yersel. Proverbs seventh, verses nine, ten, and eleven. Yer friends were there, ye ken them I mean, speirin' for ye most kindly."

With a little hot thrill Lewis sniffed another morsel of scandal.

"I hope you gave them my message," he said with sudden truculency.

"To go to——. It wasna just the place for sic messages," returned Cummy. "Then they were that kind, ye see. They're that concerned about you. Now let us get some clean tissue paper; seein' our work may be

creeticized we maun be neat and tidy. As for yer friends," she went on, her fingers busy with rations. "They were unco weel informed. No need o' newspapers when some folk are aboot. I dinna ken what wee bird whispers secrets to them, but they hear a' that goes on."

"Yes," said Lewis. "Blow your nose at the corner of Princes Street to-night and to-morrow morning it's all over the town. What is the latest, Cummy?"

"Indeed then, my dear," she replied. "I was owre thrang wi' my ain sins to bother my head owre the sins of others."

A smothered "damn" thrilled through Lewis: but before he could vent his feelings his mother popped in.

"My word! here's preparation for a feast," she cried, for she knew of the projected picnic. "Big appetites are surely expected to-day."

"Gargantuan," replied Lewis, recovering his good humor. "Only one thing lacking, good mother. A flask, not too small, with something appropriate in it."

She smiled fondly. "Possibly that too may be procurable. Which would you rather have, sherry or claret?"

"Claret," answered Lewis eagerly. "I'm with Keats who thought that claret must have been the beverage of the gods."

In reality he was not thinking of his own tastes at all.

Presently he set out, knapsack on back, like one braced for a long tramp: but when in beating excitement he reached the appointed place, it was not Bob who met him: it was Katie. He had implored her to repeat the idyll of Cramond, and in a whirl of longing and misgiving she consented, naming Roslyn as the spot of her choice. She chose it because Sir Walter the Wizard had invested it with all the magic of poetry and romance. The very name,

she declared, was musical, and over and over again she repeated it, Roslyn, Roslyn, her soft Highland intonation giving it a haunting sound of music.

"Oh!" she cried. "If I were a poet I'd make a song about it, and the refrain would be 'bonnie, bonnie Roslyn.'"

"Upon my soul I believe you are a poet," observed Lewis, at once charmed and amused. "If I try my hand at a ditty will you sing it?"

"It would be lovely," she responded, her eyes full of a dear intelligence. "And you'll bring in my refrain, 'bonnie, bonnie Roslyn,' won't you?"

"If I can screw up inspiration," Lewis replied blithely. "Only you haven't seen your bonnie Roslyn yet." And as she looked grave; "There, I'm not out to kill illusions and spoil dreams. You're going to find Roslyn the most beautiful, the most romantic spot in the world." Whereupon they laughed joyously together.

"Brave little girl," thought Lewis, regarding her with odd doting eyes. "And you'll need all your courage, my darling."

Those were the halcyon, easeful, soporific days when all the world drowsed in a never-ending Sunday afternoon; and the demon that makes men speed-crazy was as yet unloosed. A summer service of horse-drawn vehicles, a quaint cross between ancient chariot and modern wagonette, plied between Edinburgh and Roslyn, five miles distant, for the benefit of tourists, mostly American. To provident Scotland, the annual harvest of American dollars is as blessed manna from heaven. Katie chose the road, in preference to rail for several reasons, privacy and convenience among them. She was excited and tremulous, with just a suspicion of hysteria in her liveliness.

At a point ten minutes from the starting place Bob scrambled up beside them, with a casual air and a delighted greeting. Lewis watched Katie closely. This was a little plot carefully hidden from her lest, in her Highland pride and sensitiveness, she should take fright and jib. He knew how she regarded their love—something sweet, enthralling, but for the present at least, surreptitious and banned. But he also knew her courage and her loyalty, and on them he counted for victory. In the entanglement of his affairs he was anxious to win the approval of Bob, for Bob was a connoisseur in all matters of taste, as well as of conduct. Hence the fond stratagem. But he might have spared himself any such subtle manœuvring. From the moment he spoke to her so comprehendingly in that awful place by the Calton Hill, Katie and Bob understood each other, and from understanding came mutual sympathy and liking. Now her welcome was sincerely glad.

"But why didn't you tell me?" she smiled upbraidingly at Lewis on guessing the little game.

"Because, my dear," answered Lewis grandly. "It's my delight on a shiny night to give pleasant surprises."

"You are a naughty boy," she told him severely, and never honeyed word of praise sounded half so sweet in his ears. "Chums at once," he said to himself, glancing at the pair beside him.

They clatterd and rumbled southward along the main road to England, through the suburb of Newington, and crawled up Liberton Brae, with the 'furzy hills of Braid' on their right, old Craigmillar Keep, once merry with the laughter of Mary Stuart, peeping through woods to their left; and the Pentlands, like a triple-humped barrier, in front. The flush of summer had come. Its scents were

in the air: its colors gladdened the eye: its magic influences were an exhilarating cordial in the blood.

"Ah!" cried Lewis, getting to his feet, and waving his arms like an overdriven windmill. "The vilest climate under heaven smiles, yes, sir, smiles like a blooming Eden. Who dares to say Scotland is gray and sodden? *La Belle France* herself couldn't beat this." And he smote Bob jovially on the back.

Katie laughed, a clear bell-like laugh, that made Bob turn and look at her quickly and keenly.

"A laugh like that would be worth a fortune on the stage, my dear," he remarked quietly. "Say at the *Opera Comique.*"

She blushed scarlet. "You must think me very rude," she responded, taking the compliment as a sarcasm or a rebuke.

"Nothing of the sort," Bob assured her gravely. "That laugh, what would not some I know give for it?"

"Is it such a wonderful thing to laugh then?" she asked, still flushing.

"It is a very wonderful thing to laugh as you have laughed," Bob replied seriously. "Believe me, it is. A really good laugh is one of the rarest things. Beware of the man or woman who can't laugh."

"Is that a testimonial to me?" she asked, laughing again.

He bowed. To himself he was saying. "A fine nature, a very fine nature and rich, too, beyond most."

He almost envied Lewis.

Luckily the tide of trippers ran slackly that day, and they had the enchantments of Roslyn mostly to themselves. Katie, it seemed, was to be given no excuse for feeling bored or disappointed. Lewis and Bob were as escaped

schoolboys, rioting in gleeful freedom, and, charmed into forgetfulness of other things, she abandoned herself to their spirit of exuberant fun.

They explored the castle, an epitome of defunct feudalism and the days of lord and serf. In the dungeons, which are deep and dank and dark, Bob made Katie's blood suddenly run cold with a cry of "Listen, what clanking of chains was that? And, good gracious! a moan of distress. The ghosts of ill-used ladies, I'll bet."

"How you frighten me," she chided: and indeed, despite her bravery of good spirits her nerve trembled all too readily.

Somewhat more reverently they entered the chapel, where the 'Prentice Pillar at once arrested Katie's attention.

"How wonderful," she remarked, examining its scrolled and figured beauty. "How lovely, and it looks old, old."

"It is old," said Bob, watching her eagerness with curious interest. "It is also, as you say, beautiful. Beyond doubt there were artists in those days. Likewise it is a bit of real tragic romance."

"Oh! tell me," she begged, and he related the legend of the pillar. A monumental mason, yearning to be a sculptor, had been engaged in the dim ages to erect the monument: but failing in his craftsmanship had broken off work and gone abroad into France for instruction and inspiration. In his absence a boy apprentice took up the discarded tools and finished the monument with the grace and beauty still visible. His master returning and seeing work utterly beyond his own skill flew into a passion of jealousy and slew the young genius.

"Poor boy," murmured Katie pityingly. "What a monster the master must have been."

"Ah!" commented Bob. "It is still the way of the world to crucify genius."

"And then erect monuments," said Katie on a sharp breath.

"And inscribe beautiful white fibs on them," added Bob. "I often try to imagine the sardonic grin of the recording angel over the whitewashing in our cemeteries and other public places. For pure unadulterated fiction there's nothing like an epitaph."

"Here lie the dead and here the living lie," interjected Lewis.

Katie did not answer. She was peering into a mouldy half-obliterated inscription in Latin. Lewis obligingly tried to translate.

"Stumped," he owned, after several futile attempts. "Neither Virgil nor Horace. Maybe a local production. Bob, you've been to Cambridge, a place reputed to have no baths, but some elementary knowledge of the classics. Here, have a shot at it."

And after some groping Bob translated roughly:

Strong is wine: stronger is the king: stronger yet are women. But truth conquers all.

Lewis bent close remarking in Katie's ear. "There's a sentiment for you. I know a little girl who is——"

But she did not stay for the finish of the sentence. "It's chilly in here," she said turning quickly away. "Let us get back into the sun."

And with swift steps she led the way out, her companions following in mute surprise.

CHAPTER XXI

THEY had luncheon in a shady nook beside the Esk, with the wimple of running water like soft music sweetening the refection. Katie, restored to high spirits, acted as hostess at a table of silken green spread at the mossy foot of an aged oak, and mirth presided over the feast. That done she fed the birds with crumbs, while the men smoked in indolent ease, Bob an overseasoned briar and Lewis manifold half-finished cigarettes. They watched the tiny woodlings, hopping and pecking almost within touch of her feet, as if she had banished fear, or cocking their pert heads expectantly for more. She seemed to inspire them with an instant and implicit trust.

All at once Bob sat up, with pencil and half a sheet of paper.

"Go on," he cried. "Exactly as you're doing. Keep that pose and expression just a moment. Splendid."

Swiftly, unerringly the pencil traced lines and curves, his glances flitting to and fro between Katie and the paper spread on his knees; and behold a sylvan goddess, radiant and benign, in the midst of a flock of trusting, appealing birds. He held the sketch up for her to see.

"Wonderful," she cried in amazed delight. "That's genius. You did it so quickly and easily. What are you going to do with it?"

The question was asked with a tremor in which there were both joy and apprehension.

"Perhaps you will do me the honor to accept it," replied Bob. "No, on second thoughts with your permission I will keep it. I believe I could work it up into something worth looking at."

"You—you mean a picture?"

He nodded. "Unless you prefer to give me sittings," he smiled.

"Sittings? Me?" she cried in comic dismay.

"Burlington House and fame," chimed in Lewis. "Why not? With this background," he waved his arms comprehensively at wood and river, "it would be perfect. A dryad, no by gosh! the loveliest girl in all Scotland, that Reynolds would have raved over."

"You are making fun of me," she said, looking from one to the other with something of perplexity and more of fear. They did not, could not understand. No, no, it was impossible, for many reasons, not then explicable..

She was still in fluttering protest when they were interrupted by a voice from behind.

"Please excuse me for intruding," it said politely. "I guess this is the river Esk, ain't it?"

As they turned quickly the speaker, hat in hand, made three separate, elaborate bows, that to Katie being almost an obeisance. He was a pleasant-looking, ruddy-faced, medium-sized man somewhere in the fifties, and beside him stood a self-possessed, quietly observant girl of twenty or so, obviously his daughter. Their approach over the soft lush grass had been completely silent.

The salutation acknowledged with equal politeness, Lewis answered that the gentleman's guess was quite correct. This was the river Esk.

"American, I think?" he added, with another bow.

The gentleman smiled. "Why—yes. Just having a look round old Scotland before getting along to France," he volunteered affably. "Italy was skeduled for the trip. Had to be dropped out; couldn't be worked in nohow. Another time, I reckon. After Paris and a bit of rural France, we make for Germany, the Rhine, Dresden,

Berlin, and so forth. Then I guess we'll make a scoot for the land of the midnight sun." He beamed pleasantly.

"You Americans understand the art of globe-trotting," observed Lewis, ostensibly addressing the father but slyly regarding the daughter.

"Well! yes," admitted the stranger modestly. "I reckon we do hustle round some. Little more'n a month ago I was in 'Frisco: four days later I dropped into Leavenworth, Kansas: next hopped along to Kansas City, Missouri, and from there made a beeline back home to St. Louis to pack for Yurrup."

The girl by his side laughed softly. "Much packing you did. Left it all to Ma and me."

"That's so," he owned amiably. "Womenfolk are bully packers. Men ain't in it. Yes! been moving round some. And this," casting a look round the scene, "is what the guide book calls 'bonnie Scotland.'"

"Possibly, sir, you have associations with the old land," remarked Lewis.

Producing his case the stranger smilingly presented his card. It bore the words:

Amos Wilbur Macara.
Real Estate.

With an address numbered some thousands up, in Prairie Avenue, St. Louis.

"Ah!" said Lewis, with quickened interest. "Macara. Almost smells of peat-reek. The heather isn't more Highland nor the thistle more Scotch."

"Two generations American," replied Mr. Macara complacently. "And all the centuries back of that Highland Scotch, as you infer, sir. Celtic through and through, and 'bout as ancient as Noah, I guess. Some day I'm going

to have, what is it you call it? the College of Heralds over here set going on the pedigree of the Clan Macara. Some dickering in antiquities, I reckon. Time came when the family got tired of paying rent to people who did nothing but squeeze and grab for a living. So old Tom Macara emigrated for freedom and a chance to make good. Well! thank you very much. Better be getting along, Alice."

But Lewis had been thinking as well as talking. These amiable Americans brought a pleasant smack of the great world and were agreeable in themselves.

"If you had come just a little sooner," he remarked, "we'd have done ourselves the pleasure of inviting you to share our modest gipsy luncheon. There's still something left untouched."

He drew from his knapsack an unopened packet of sandwiches and held up the flask to indicate it was not quite empty.

"I wonder if Miss Macara?" He bowed with insinuating grace.

She smiled at him appreciatively. "I guess a sandwich right now would taste mighty good," she owned frankly.

"My! you ain't backward in coming forward, are you Alice?" her father laughed. Then to Lewis. "You are very kind, sir. Sightseeing's a mighty hungry business for sure. It don't let the appetite go to sleep. 'Pears we accept your invitation."

For half an instant Miss Macara looked hard at Katie; then, with a friendly "let us sit here," plumped down on the grass beside her. Mr. Macara seated himself with a comfortable sigh a few feet off. Lewis and Bob kept a-foot to do the butling, as they said.

"My! they are good," Miss Macara observed, munch-

ing with joyous gusto. "Often come out here for an appetite?"

"This is my first visit," Katie replied, flushing in spite of herself.

She was nervously shy: to Miss Macara shyness, nervousness did not exist except as a foible of the fainting heroines of early Victorian fiction. Katie wondered at her aplomb, her ease, her perfect self-possession, and by contrast felt embarrassed and awkward. Besides—but of other things she dared not think.

Luckily the guests engaged the entire attention. Mr. Macara, at once expansive and statistical, had much to ask concerning British trade and commerce. As neither Lewis nor Bob knew anything of either, he generously went off into detailed information regarding the United States, just then recovering, like a young giant, from the severe internal bleeding of civil war. On that pivot he swung easily to purely personal matters. Alice, knowing well from the twinkle in his eye whither he was veering, remarked with a light laugh:

"Oh! yes, tell. You wouldn't be happy if you didn't."

And chuckling good-humoredly over the permission he told. While still in short frocks Alice had been kissed by Abraham Lincoln, the beloved Abe Lincoln. Ulysses S. Grant did her a like honor. But dearest of all, Mr. Macara guessed, was the never-to-be-forgotten hour with Longfellow in his own home. As loot she carried away a copy of his poems, with her name and his own in the poet's autograph.

"How interesting," breathed Katie, scarcely aware that she spoke. Longfellow was one of her own idols.

The Longfellow triumph, Mr. Macara reckoned, was

like blood to a lion's cub. Alice extended her raids all over the States, wherever a celebrity was to be caught, and contrary to all rulings of the Monroe Doctrine (here Mr. Macara chuckled gleefully) carried her operations into Britain. Already she had bagged Mr. Tennyson, Mr. Browning, and Mr. Swinburne (poets first); Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Disraeli, Mr. Darwin, George Eliot, and other first-class celebrities, with several dukes, bishops, and actresses. Her tastes were catholic.

Mr. Carlyle, the most interesting of the lions, had so far foiled her. He simply took no notice, the grumpy old thing, though she was at pains to be flattering about his books which were awfully hard to read. She understood that authors were such an outrageously vain race one had only to butter them deftly to elicit a response by return of post, saying how perfectly charmed they were. Mr. Carlyle disdained the charmer, but she would have him yet, you bet she would, if she had to stalk her game by sitting for a week on his doorstep in Cheyne Row, Chelsea. Later her programme was to invade France and Germany, with a possible shot at the Pope and Garibaldi.

Lewis was all ears and attention, but before he could make any comment Alice had whipped out an autograph album (carried for just such occasions) and a fountain pen, then a rare and curious novelty. Would her hosts kindly sign in commemoration of this happy meeting? Katie with many nervous scruples, signed first, then Lewis with a flourish,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

To add distinction Bob enclosed the signatures in an ornamental scroll, thus conferring on them a sort of

aristocratic exclusiveness. With a serene and graceful "Thank you very much," Alice pocketed her treasure.[1]

Business done she rose briskly and with a glance at her father said they must really be getting along now. It appeared that Roslyn, with its sylvan, romantic attractions, was not the real object of their pilgrimage. Alice, as her father intimated with a sly grin, was so gone on literatoor that willy-nilly she dragged him to the shrine (so she called it) of two guys who wrote poetry ever so many ages before she was born. He took no stock in poetry himself. Not in his line. 'Change knew nothing of it. You couldn't dicker in it as in real estate, or pull off a deal that swelled your bank account by thousands. Didn't seem to him in any way a practical proposition. But the era was one of well-trained parents, and here he was, obliging and obedient.

Gently advising him not to be a Matthew Arnold Philistine, Alice announced that she was really on the trail of Ben Jonson and William Drummond, especially of Ben.

Lewis gave a resounding whoop of joy. "Hawthornden," he cried. "We are quite close to it. Let us all go."

They went, Lewis jubilantly electing himself leader. But in the course of a breezy dialogue along the bank of the Esk, he made a discovery, delightful to the literary idealist though sobering to vanity. Alice could teach him the inner history of British poetry. She had it all patter than the pattest guide book, since hers was first-hand knowledge.

"Welcome, welcome, royal Ben,
Thank you, thank you, Hawthornden,"

[1] I wonder if those autographs are extant anywhere in the United States to-day? If so what a scoop for the collector.

she recited, and quoted *verbatim* from the account of Ben's famous visit and Hawthornden's opinion when his guest was gone.

Lewis complimented her ardently, remarking that royal Ben appeared to have been something of a braggart.

"Oh! fairly ran over with arrogance and self-conceit, and splashed like a whale in the slops," Alice owned. "Still I like a man who is a man, and not a sham or a makeshift."

"*Drink to me only with thine eyes,*" Lewis repeated significantly.

"A lovely lyric," said Alice, without a blush. "That's pretty much why I'm here."

Lewis looked at her with eyes of curiosity and admiration. A pilgrim to the shrine of genius. In the spirit of romance, of devotion to an ideal, she had crossed three thousand miles of ocean to tread in the footsteps of famous men of letters. Was she typical of American girls? If so, then by gosh! America was centuries ahead of some lands he knew.

"I gather, Miss Macara, you don't object to a little wholesome egotism in your heroes," he hazarded. It was a subject near his heart.

Alice smiled, wisely, tolerantly.

"No, indeed. If a man wants to be egotistical why let him. I guess it'll help him along to slip the curb and let vanity go whiz."

"You mean it doesn't offend to chant the song of self, as, say, your Walt Whitman does?" He was watching her with the alert attention of a bird, his eyes aglow with vivacity.

"Offend!" Alice trilled the word in amusement. "It's perfectly delightful. If he's game to do it well. In any

case it's what he'd like to do, and if courage pans out it saves him from being a sneaking hypocrite."

"A false humility," said Lewis.

"Absolutely the most detestable thing on earth is mock modesty," said Alice with surprising emphasis. "Give me the frank egotist every time. And it pays," she added sagely. "Only fools forget that the world takes a man at his own valuation—mostly."

"Ah!" said Lewis in profound agreement. Here was sweet doctrine, stimulating doctrine, the very doctrine he hugged to his heart. He glanced admiringly at Miss Macara. Had an inscrutable Providence sent her all the way across the Atlantic just to give him his cue, just to fortify him in his own sublime resolutions? Already he felt as light, as aerial as if wings were sprouting from his shoulders for a heavenward flight. He would have continued the delightful dialogue: but just then Bob turned from some distance in front, remarking:

"Here we are."

When Alice had explored the classic shades of Hawthornden, with a running commentary on the tastes of British poets for strong drink, the whole partly made the return journey together. In separating, Mr. Macara, avowing his delight in the day's experience, issued a general invitation to dinner at his hotel "to meet Mrs. Macara" who was resting from the fatigues of sightseeing. Lewis and Bob accepted joyously: but for reasons which could not be explained Katie begged to be excused, though Lewis's eyes clearly implored her to come. Flushing hotly she stuck to her refusal. The adventure would be too much, too dangerous for all concerned.

All afternoon since the advent of Alice she had been silent and unhappy. It was not jealousy that perturbed

her, though she could not help noticing the eager, facile gallantries of Lewis. There were moments when, she felt, he forgot her presence altogether in his attentions to the bright American girl who was so free, so charming, so simply natural and so palpably belonged to a different world from hers. Lewis of course was right, and in secret bitterness she blamed herself for being there at all. Her place was not with such people. Their very cordiality, their warm-hearted acceptance of her on terms of perfect equality hurt cruelly. It was a relief from hidden torment when the parting came and she could escape.

"I am so sorry you can't come," Alice assured her in the friendliest manner. "Well! it has been perfectly delightful. We must meet again. We have still a few days left for Edinburgh."

With an inward quiver which made her suddenly pale, Katie evaded the suggestion of another meeting, and almost before they knew she had said "Good-by" and flitted out of sight. Lewis had an impulse to follow: but a quick glance of inhibition as she turned away restrained him. Bob breathed hard on a throb of pity. *"La pauvre petite,"* he said to himself, once again, well understanding her feelings. *"La pauvre petite."*

Lewis accompanied him to his hotel in order to decide a delicate point of etiquette. How should they dress for this interesting American function? The Americans would be in full dress, the ladies probably flashing in diamonds. Flicking a lighted cigarette as he paced the room Lewis explained his inveterate ineradicable antipathy to conventional *bon-ton* toggery.

"Well!" inquired Bob. "What outfit do you propose?"

"As you are aware I have evolved a nice decorative

scheme of my own for such occasions," was the grinning answer. " It consists of a velvet jacket, much worn, such as you behold this moment, a black shirt of good coarse poplin—that's the stuff for hard wear—tweed trousers of the most blatantly obtrusive pattern obtainable: a collar that out-Byrons Byron: a tie of blinding azure or hectic red, with accessories to match. Your artistic sense will at once perceive the happy harmony of colors, the alluring picturesqueness of contrasts."

"A bit sensational, eh? " commented Bob.

" Sensational," echoed Lewis exultantly. " My dear fellow, it seizes the attention like a conflagration or a bad smell. You should see the elect of our little parochial Mayfair tilting noses when I grace their assembly with my distinguished presence. Shrugs, nods, winks, looks, an avalanche of flattery. It's intoxicating 'pon my soul! it almost makes me feel vain, and you know my unconquerable modesty. Some day I'll put the whole show in a book or better still in a play, and won't the gallery roar? "

" Original and striking," said Bob. " Still as the Macaras are civilized people more or less whom you don't want to astound, shock or scandalize——"

"And the fair Alice a demnition nice girl," Lewis chipped in. "And dressy. Yes, I know. For her sake I consent to appear for one evening only in the guise of a counterfeit waiter." Fortunately his mother had seen to it that his wardrobe included a dress suit.

Two hours later they entered the hotel, Lewis treading gingerly in his unaccustomed " rig out." In the hall Alice met them, not in evening dress but in hat and travelling costume. With fervent apologies and regrets she informed them that dinner was off. Her father coming up behind explained, also with effusive apologies and regrets. An

hour before he got a cable. A New York combine was trapezing into St. Louis: big real estate deals were on the horizon and he was wanted on the spot.

"First train for Liverpool, first boat for New York and then a scoot for Prairie Avenue, St. Louis. Sorry: but biz is biz, gents," said Mr. Macara briskly.

In their admiration for the energy and promptitude of the American business man they almost forgot their disappointment. They seemed to look on the money-making gift in full blast. Instead of dining they saw the party off at the station. Alice was a little excited and very gracious. Her last word was a message to Katie, which Lewis was charged to deliver.

"Just hop across to the States, all three of you," was Mr. Macara's parting counsel. "Fine country: big prospects. Don't forget the address; Prairie Avenue, St. Louis. Always at home for friends."

CHAPTER XXII

AS THE train steamed out Alice stood smiling by an open window waving a friendly, or as Lewis was ready to swear, an affectionate farewell.

"A demnition fine girl," he reiterated with unction.

"Kind of makes your longing arms itch, eh?" said Bob with a sardonic grin.

Lewis gurgled. "Feel that way? Well! why don't you wade in and win the prize?"

"Wade in?" echoed Bob. "I was awed by your cool, colossal cheek. You just froze on to her, preëmpted her like a staked out claim."

Lewis sighed dolorously.

"And now she's swallowed up by that blooming tunnel, and I'll never see my darling Nelly Gray any more. Look you, I have a good mind to act on the hospitable Macara's invitation and take a leetle trip to the Un-ited States one of these fine days—cash permitting. St. Louis. Quite appropriate for yours truly. Prairie Avenue! Suggests wide spaces, buaffaloes, Red Indians, wide, wide fields of wheat and corn—freedom, romance, grub and plenty of it. Real Estate: that means land and houses, I believe. Think the delightful Amos Wilbur would stump up for an A 1, tip-top pedigree model son-in-law?"

"Ought to be good for a neat, brown, stone-fronted nest for love to coo in," answered Bob.

"Plus the sinews of war," added Lewis quickly. "In this misbegotten world that's a *sine quo non,* my boy. No use trying to keep going on a bellyful of east wind, varied by spasmodic cuddling to keep warm. I say, Bob, suppose we save up our loose bawbees, no, better still

raise a forced loan and fare out West together. Rather want to see America anyway. With its crop of heiresses it ought to be a good spec, eh?"

"For a low down, sordid, mercenary, money-grabbing Shylock like you," responded Bob. "Meantime I beg to remind you that we haven't dined. I'm both hungry and thirsty."

"It's a jamboree you're after," laughed Lewis. "Well! what for no'? Painting the town red like a pair of waiters on the skite. Oh! ye mocking gods! Frankly I'm as peckish as a nun in the tail end of Lent. Saved up my appetite for that beautiful Barmecide feast with the adorable Alice. Now she's gone and I ain't got nuffin' to keep going on except my own virtue."

"A light covering in this dreary clime," chortled Bob.

"Knew you'd understand," grinned Lewis. "Well! since the élite have abandoned us, I propose something savory on our own. I think Lucky MacGilpin's would about suit us. Fried fish and chips, sorsidges and onions and other dainties that would give a French chef fits. The very smell is a feast. Come on."

When they entered the frowsy eating-house in a back street near the University, well known to Lewis, the presiding divinity raised her immense greasy hands in astonishment.

"Lord save us a'," she cried. "What's this?"

The stranger might pass, but Velvet Coat in a swallow-tail and white tie, like a West End toff. It was incredible.

"Losh! is it merrit yer goin' to be?" she asked in the next breath. "It'll be a braw, braw weddin' in that dress."

"Latest style, my dear Mrs. MacGilpin," Lewis assured her with grave politeness. "Specially designed for the occasion."

The lady chuckled hilariously, so that her whole, big, loose, bulging person shook like an enormous shape of jelly.

"Think o' that now," she cried, wiping the perspiration with the edge of her apron from a face that was perpetually moist. "My man Donald merrit me in a kilt."

"Ah!" responded Lewis with a wicked twinkle. "It isn't every man who is so privileged on his wedding day. Thanks, not stewed eels to-night. Sausages and mash, if you please."

Their hunger and thirst appeased, and some free-and-easy jests exchanged with the jocular and not too delicate Mrs. MacGilpin, they called for Charlie whom they found in that mood of despondency, not infrequent after a holiday spent not wisely but too well. The sight of Lewis moved him to uproarious mirth.

"Waitah, waitah," he guffawed. "A pint of beah, please."

Nothing offended, Lewis pranced round the room, spreading out his coat tails in imitation of a peacock, and as he pirouetted he chanted gayly:

"Now amn't I bonnie and amn't I braw?
The pink o' the fashion am I.
The nattiest laddie that ever ye saw,
Tail-coat—and biled shirt—and white tie."

The bout of chaffing over Charlie was told the tale of the day's proceedings, with details calculated to excite envy. Alice would have been amazed by her own image in Lewis's glowing picture of a bewitching gilt-edged, eligible, unattached beauty.

"Wish I had been there to have a throw at the dice," Charlie remarked with affected gloom. "I could do with

an heiress just at present. Only no such luck. Beauty and riches always go to some other fellow."

Cash being a present necessity they reckoned resources and found that by pooling they probably had enough to meet all reasonable social demands for the evening. Bob, as capitalist of the party, proposed to draw on private reserves to make up deficiencies, but of that the others would not hear. They were sportsmen, not sponges. Wherefore it must be shot and shot alike.

That important matter settled Charlie inquired innocently what the programme was. Lewis pondered a moment. There was Brash's, where, alas! his credit was at zero, for which reason he had lately been subjected to grievous indignities. There was Bolem's, where he was likewise in debt, though always welcome, and there was the gilded den of iniquity by the Calton Hill which the mercenary Johnny Crepaud ran on the ready-money principle. It was for the meeting to decide.

"I dislike my pleasures *a la carte,*" observed Bob with some decision. "Too much like taking tea with the curate under the eye of the Rector's elderly maiden sister. I prefer unpremeditated joys for my night out."

"Excellent philosophy," cried Lewis. *"A outrance.* The whole hog and a free hand. Only, caution, my boy. Mrs. Grundy's on the prowl."

Bob smiled derisively.

"Listen, when I left it Paris was in a hum of delight over a great discovery. The celebrated Monsieur Renan, the high priest of the æsthetic, has discovered that the philosophy of the libertine is the only true and natural one. Paris rose to it in a blaze of enthusiasm."

"Look at that now," cried Lewis. "Here by precept and example I devote myself to the same great doctrine

and what's my reward? To be for ever in hot water, scalding hot, by Jove. While M. Renan, who is merely an academic theorist, is hailed with plaudits of joy and gratitude. Doubtless the French are the people."

He spread his hands in an eloquent gesture. "Still we can but persevere, and to-night I propose the rôle of the never-sufficiently-to-be-praised Haroun Al Raschid, and to blazes with the Ten Commandments."

Over his arm he carried a long black cloak of Highland pattern. This he threw about him with a melodramatic air: then clapping on a limp, well-worn wide-awake he surveyed himself in a mirror.

"Quite a creditable immitation of a stage brigand," commented Bob. "A little more ferocity where the moustache ought to be would be an advantage. Pull your hat down a bit to one side. So. That's better, more piratical you know. Auld Reekie will be enchanted."

Lewis made a sweeping bow, imitated from the heroes of Dumas.

"On Stanley, on," he cried, striding to the door. "And may the gods of love, wine, and gay adventure be gracious and accommodating."

An indefinite time later they went eastward along Princes Street arm in arm, with elated steps and a riotous inclination to burst into song. A bright moon lighted their way, making them conspicuous in the thinning line of muttering and amazed pedestrians, who stared and nodded significantly.

To one passer-by Lewis drew ironic attention.

"Behold," he said to Bob. "Our northern light of rhetoric, our bright particular star, Davie Masson, the man who murdered poor John Milton and buried him

fathoms deep in a leaden six volume biography. There's a crime against art and literature for you."

"A verdict of unjustifiable literary homicide," laughed Bob.

"Poor fellow thinks he's a second Carlyle," snickered Lewis. "Lord forgive us our vanities."

Then waving a hand at the Castle he declaimed jubilantly, "Edina, Scotia's darling seat, all hail thy palaces and towers."

"Ay," growled a large policeman sotto voce. "Palaces and towers. And yon's the Calton jyle where you'd be cooling your heels if I had my way, you young daftie."

"Three o' them nae less," he continued to himself. "It'll be quod or a's over if they don't look out, the roaring young devils. The girrls'll make hay o' them afore the nicht's owre. Ay, there they go. I thocht as much."

From the shadow of the Register House where, as Lewis gayly remarked, Satan lay in wait, three girls suddenly emerged. There was a pause, the policeman watching intently. Then the procession of six proceeded two by two, halted a moment at a street corner and disappeared.

"Just so," reflected the policeman with the sagacity of his calling. "I kent it," and resumed his beat. After all, the morals of three roystering blades, to whom God had denied sense, were no affair of his.

Meanwhile contrary to the law's expectations, Lewis was making certain protests in verse, being then as he felt, bung full of poetry.

> "Oh! not to-night, Matilda Jane.
> The man in the moon's a watchin'.
> He sees us through his spy-glass plain
> And the old rip's nosing for mischief."

The girl at his side laughed hoarsely. She was the broad-beamed, full-bosomed amazon with whom he had several times exchanged pleasantries in Bolem's and the Calton Hill howff.

"Losh! and when did ye take to the preachin'?" she inquired hilariously. "Ye'll be for mountin' the white choker next."

With a magnificent, if slightly wavering gesture, he flung open his cloak, displaying what seemed a ludicrous expanse of white. Her eyes bulged: for a moment she held her breath over the astonishing spectacle. Then she shrieked in laughter.

"Jenny, Bella, here's a sicht. Just hae a look at Velvet Coat."

"Hee, hee," they cackled crowding about him. "Losh, but we're braw," and they made him a mock curtsey.

Bob's face suddenly became grim.

"Damn 'em," he growled in Charlie's ear. "Have they never seen a man in evening dress before?"

"Not this man," replied Charlie, with a slow heaving gurgle, meant to express the acme of the absurd.

"Let's get him away," said Bob in a harsh whisper. "This comedy seems to me anything but comic."

But Lewis was far too exalted to give heed to discretion or derision. Besides the amazon had him firmly in tow.

"Well! well!" she observed, breaking in on the giggling babble of her two companions. "We're not too grand or too proud for a drink anyway, are we, Velvet Coat?"

With a superb gesture Lewis wrapped his cloak about him, and gave his baby moustache a high, cavalier twist.

He was thinking how Monsieur d'Artagnan would behave on so fine, so distinguished an occasion. The howff was near: the lady alluring. In a heady glow he held out his arm like a dancing master: the lady promptly took it, or as much of it as his cloak left available, and with a ringing command: "Forward, gallants all," he led the way.

Bob shrugged his shoulders, muttering, "This grows hot," but followed without protest. At the close-mouth the whole party halted. Inside a man was singing.

"His nabs is discovering that music hath charms that make for gayety," remarked Lewis. "Come, let us be merry."

As they went down the flagged passage the man's voice stopped and a woman's rose high and clear. Suddenly Lewis trembled as with a galvanic shock. The voice was Katie's. He did not know she was to sing that night. Slipping quietly forward single file, at a sign from Lewis, they paused just as the male singer was taking up his part again. The duet was "Huntingtower."

Katie saw Lewis and his companions enter, and though his own vision was hazy he fancied she paled perceptibly. But she went through her part as if the song completely engrossed her, and presently sat down in a whirlwind of applause. Then, monsieur, with all the insinuating art of Montmartre, hastened up to congratulate her and beg for more. After some hesitation she returned to the improvised platform alone. And then to the amazement and enchantment of all she became arch and gay and lively with "Oh! whistle and I'll come to you, my lad."

Again she sat down in a tumult of cheering, and Lewis, blind and deaf to all else, crushed forward and attempted

to speak to her. But with a quick glance and shake of the head she warned him off. Monsieur was beside her, praising, coaxing, pleading with her to sing again. While the audience shouted deliriously "Encore, encore" to an accompaniment of stamping and clapping of hands. She shook her head: but they would take no denial; and with a little bow of assent she stepped up again. There came a tornado of applause, and then sudden, eager expectant silence.

She seemed to hesitate, either as if she did not know what to sing or was unable to begin. Bob, watching with the trained eye of the critic, saw her tremble, and he thought she looked pathetically, pitiably lonely, that in fact she was readier to cry than to sing. He saw her bracing herself: and then suddenly on the thick murk there floated, like a shimmer of sweet sound, the opening notes of the "Outlaw's Song" from Rokeby. He gave a gasp, half of surprise, half of alarm. Why, why on earth that extraordinary choice for such an audience? Lewis, too excited for thought, gazed, all his senses in his eyes. The audience rustled an instant and was still, in the spell of utter fascination. When she reached the verse:

> And when I'm with my comrades met
> Beneath the greenwood bough:
> What once we were we all forget:
> Nor think what we are now.

It seemed that all the regret, the remorse, the anguish of shattered dreams and hopes of which the human heart is capable were distilled into four hopeless burning lines. There was not a man in all the place who did not feel himself the outlaw nor a woman who did not breathe hard

through tears. And then, as though the singer waved a magic wand of balm and solace, came the contrast and relief:

> Yet Brignall banks are fresh and fair,
> And Greeta woods are green.
> And you may gather garlands there
> Would grace a summer queen.

She seemed to put into it all the sweetness of spring, all the joyous innocence of unsullied youth, the carolling of birds, the whisper of leaves, the ripple of flowing water, the scent and bloom of flowers, the ecstasy and the longing of love.

"By God," said Bob, aloud, and again, "By God." Just then appreciation could go no further.

Watching with sharpened vision he noticed that when she stepped down to plaudits tenfold intensified, her eyes were wet. And no wonder. She had performed a miracle; and miracles take it out of the performer. She had breathed the breath of purity and romance into the hearts of depraved men and outcast women: she had melted them, filled them, he felt sure, with regret and an infinite tenderness and longing for what they had lost. Glancing at the eyes fixed on her he knew that at that moment not a single soul in all the queer assembly had one evil thought.

And she who wrought the spell? His heart swelled and his eyes smarted as he looked at her, standing a little apart, not as one who had just achieved a thrilling triumph, but as one who endured a cruel ordeal. "*La pauvre petite,*" he murmured to himself for the twentieth time. "*La pauvre petite,*" Lord God! what a thing was life, what a thing.

In her haste to be gone she refused the invitation to sit down. A minute Monsieur and she conferred privately:

then throwing a loose wrap about her she walked swiftly away, looking neither to right nor to left. She was bare-headed, and the light falling on her lustrous black hair, gave it the gleam of polished ebony. A tiny rose, her sole ornament, set half-coquettishly at the side, shone blood red. A sough of pent up emotion swept the audience. For a moment it was absolutely still as under a spell: then a dozen men, the pick of the company, leaped to their feet eager to do her the honor of an escort. But like a flash Lewis sprang ahead of them.

"Good-night, you fellows," he flung to Bob and Charlie over his shoulder. "Look after the girls. See you to-morrow."

Next instant Katie and he disappeared together.

CHAPTER XXIII

HI! BY Jiminy, a narrow squeak," panted Lewis on a triumphant breath, as they stepped outside. " Made a bolt for it, didn't they? Thought they'd get ahead of me, ha, ha."

He seized Katie's arm with a grip that made her cry out, " Oh! you hurt me. My arm isn't made of iron."

" No, but your lips are made of honey," and suiting the action to the word he caught her in a vehement embrace.

" Don't, don't. Stop it," she protested half angrily.

" Thanks, I'm not stopping," he returned and kissed her again.

She shook herself free, demanding, " Do you forget that we are in the street? You mustn't be foolish. You don't know who may be watching."

"As if I cared," he laughed. " Let them watch. Let them spy and prowl till they burst with envy. Let 'em go on feeding on sour grapes. Some folk are all spleen. They make the angels in heaven wroth and the devil himself sick with disgust. What's it to us, my love? "

"Ah! but that won't do at all," rejoined Katie gravely. "And—and you shouldn't have come out, Lewis. It's very rude to leave your friends. Please go back to them at once."

"And leave my enchanting *fleur-de-luce?* " cried Lewis. " Never. Give me the girl I love and let the lave go by. That's me, my dear, for better or for worse."

She saw that he was excited: she saw also that he had been where, " the quaighs were deep and the liquor strong,"

and her knowledge embraced the vital fact that a man three sheets in the wind, a man inspired by John Barleycorn to high and bold adventure is many degrees more dangerous than one who keels over and reclines sweetly in the arm of the wine god. Not in the wholly drunk, as certainly not in the wholly sober, lurks peril, but at some indeterminate point between, where Puck links hands with Caliban. She did not think of his as either: but she knew that a liquorish madness worked in his brain, inciting him to what he might regret. It was hers to prevent folly.

He paid ecstatic tribute to her triumph in the howff. She had simply enchanted, dazzled, conquered everybody. For certain she was shaping to be a Prima Donna. One of these days she would go to London, perhaps to Paris (there Bob would be ready to trumpet her arrival) and take the shine out of all rivals, if—a big, big if—he could or would let her go.

"My word! how they did hang on your lips to-night," he cried in a voice athrill with exultation. "And by Jove! didn't you jolly well make me feel like that poor devil of an outlaw? I was just sorry over most everything I ever did. Lord! how the worm of remorse did gnaw. Then in a twinkling the sun shone and the birds sang, and behold love and Katie, my Katie."

A faint smile flickered across her face. Though she felt no pleasure in the howff triumphs she let him run on, like the wildly excited boy he was. Talk, she told herself, was the very best safety valve in his present mood. Presently when the torrent of words abated a little she remarked half shyly.

"I like you in evening dress, Lewis."

"Do you, do you?" he cried. "Some folk are pleased

to be sarcastic." And he told how others made sport of him. Her face flushed in anger.

"I don't see why," she said resentfully. "I think a gentleman always looks well in evening dress."

He was far too deeply flattered to intrude with his own counterfeit waiter similitude. "A gentleman," said Katie, and her praise was ravishing music. She knew, he observed, why he appeared in that outfit: but she did not know of a beautiful Barmecide feast with the Macaras, and the events that followed. These he described with much laughter and comic detail, mimicking Lucky MacGilpin with riotous mirth. Katie listened without more than a word here and there of question or comment. On two points wisdom counselled silence for the present: she would say nothing of Alice, nor yet of the company in which he reached the howff. Those were matters for a more convenient season.

By a stratagem of which, in his sublime elation, Lewis was not aware, they took a right instead of a left turning (as he intended) off Princes Street towards the northern outskirts of the town. He had again taken Katie's arm, his clasp presently descending to her waist. She could feel his excitement growing. He seemed to be palpitating all over; and in some trepidation she halted, suggesting they should now return.

"They'll be wondering what has come over you. You must get back to your friends. Come and I'll convoy you part of the way."

With a swift turn he caught her by both arms.

"My little girl what are you up to?" he demanded. "Back to my friends! Hee, hee, that's good. To-night, my dear, you are all mine."

Next instant she was crushed in his arms and he was murmuring deliriously. "Love, to-night, my love. Leave you! I could devour you."

Partially freeing herself she made a feint of laughing. "Oh, but I'm sure I'd disagree with you." Then in a coaxing, beseeching tone. "Come, I wouldn't for the world have your friends thinking you rude and blaming me."

"This night is for you and me, my love," repeated Lewis. "Let us make it a night of nights."

A look of exquisite pain shadowed Katie's face. She laid a hand on his sleeve appealingly. "Lewis, dear, listen——"

But Lewis was in no mood to listen or to heed her. His arteries were beating deliriously: passion sang its wild insensate song in his ears.

"I go with you," he cried. "With you and no one else, my charmer. Friends are things that can wait."

He made a clutch as if to crush her in his arms again. With one of her quick agile movements she evaded him, laughing lightly as in frolic, though there was sudden fear in her heart.

"You little Serpent of Old Nile," he cried, and she noticed that his voice was hoarse. "I'll have you," and made a dash in pursuit. "There my elusive one, you see," he panted huskily in the next breath. "Now I have you and you're not going to give me the slip this time."

He drew her to him so fiercely she could not breathe. A moment he held her, overpowering her by sheer physical force. Then all at once he paused: his hold relaxed, and, with a gurgling convulsive cough, he let her go. His cloak was wide open; in the bright moonlight a dark blotch

appeared on his white shirt front. In spite of herself Katie gave a cry of terror.

"Oh! Lewis, oh! my dear, my dear!"

He was sobered instantly.

"Yes," he said with preternatural calm, "it is blood."

In a flash he thought of Keats and his fatal warning. He staggered a little as if faint, and she put an arm about him, clasping him with all her strength lest he should fall.

"Stand very quiet," she said, and he could feel the tumultuous beating of her heart. "There. Now lean all your weight on me."

By chance she had in her pocket a tiny little bottle of Eau de Cologne, meant to refresh her after her ordeal in the howff, but not used. This she got out, and uncorking it quickly held it to his lips.

"Take a good mouthful," she told him. "Hold it as long as you can. If you swallow a little it won't do any harm. There, throw back your head."

He did as he was told obediently: then spitting out the liquid he looked into her drawn, terrified face.

"Don't be frightened, dearest," he said softly. "I have had this sort of thing before."

"Now, you mustn't talk," she returned. "Please."

Already her quick brain was working. They had stopped by a bridge over a small, clear, swift-flowing stream. Telling him to hold on by the parapet for an instant she took her wrap and laid it on a grassy slope.

"Now, lie down, very, very quietly. Yes, on your back. So."

Having put him into position she took his handkerchief and her own and turned to the stream. Just there the bank was steep: but she was down with a leap into water almost to her knees. How she scrambled back she did

not know: but next minute she was bathing his face. That done she dropped to her knees, unloosed his collar and laved his throat. Then quickly she undid the stud of his shirt and gently pushed the wet cloths down till they rested on his chest.

"Is it very cold?" she whispered. "But you see it's a styptic." She used the technical word unconsciously. "That's what's needed."

Looking up at her he patted her cheek fondly, so that she bit her lip to keep back the tears.

"You are very brave, dear," she said, a quiver in her voice. "Now you must get home at once. Let me fix you."

She took away the wet handkerchiefs, already beginning to steam, and buttoned up his cloak tight about his throat against the chill night air. That done she helped him to his feet, using all her strength, put her right arm about him and drew his left arm around her left shoulder, telling him not to be afraid to lean, for he must make as little exertion as possible.

"I wish I could carry you," she remarked, with the ghost of a smile. Since that was not possible she insisted he should walk in silence. For a little he obeyed: then there was a whisper in her ear:

"Katie, I was a beast. You forgive me, dearest?"

"If it's silly you're going to be I'll scold," retorted Katie. "Haven't I told you to be quiet?"

"Yes, I know. But—Katie, you love me?"

"Yes, dear," she answered frankly, "I love you, Lewis. That's why——" she checked herself, feeling suddenly as if her face were on fire.

Lewis understood. He was suffering a sharp recoil, a sort of spiritual nausea with himself. As in a mirror he

saw Katie's goodness and loyalty, and the vision brought a wave of adoration. After a pause came another whisper:

"My darling, I don't think I have ever been so happy as I am at this moment."

She turned, lifted her face, raised herself quickly on tiptoe and kissed him.

"Now," she commanded sternly. "Not another word, not one. I won't have it. Talking's the very worst thing you could do."

Progress was slow, but happily the journey was short. Katie's shoes squelched water as if they were pressed sponges, and her drenched skirts twisted and clung about her ankles like coiling ropes. But of such trifles she was unaware.

"You're feeling better," she remarked again and again. "Only you're not leaning half heavily enough. Don't be afraid. I'm ever so strong. Why, many and many a time I have held a sheep that was jumping mad to get away from me."

His answer was a fonder pressure of the arm about her shoulder.

She saw him to the very door, up six steps from the street, as she counted. Then with her hand on the bell-knob she paused a second in doubt. Should she see Lewis into the house or should she not? The indecision was but momentary. Whatever might be beyond that door for her she must see him into safety. With a steady pull she rang the bell, and while they waited she gave a few hurried words of counsel.

"And maybe I'll write you a little letter, dear, saying how we may meet again when you're able," she told him, as answering footsteps sounded within.

Cummy opened the door and stood a moment in the

gaslight, a stout, suspicious, interrogative figure, glancing first at Lewis and then more slowly and suspiciously at his companion. She noticed that the rose in Katie's hair hung awry and that one gleaming coil lay scattered on her cheek. Behind with quick anxious steps came Lewis's mother.

" He's had a slight attack of illness in the street," Katie explained with all the composure she could command. "And I have helped him home. It's nothing very serious, I think," she added for comfort.

" Thank you, my dear, thank you," said his mother, and turned with a look of alarm to Lewis.

He smiled at her assuringly, saying he felt all right again, thanks to the prompt aid he had received.

" The young lady must come in so that we can thank her properly," said his mother. But already Katie was down the steps and speeding along the pavement as in flight.

CHAPTER XXIV

FOR several days Lewis lay on his back sucking ice, sipping milk and soda, and making wry faces over doses of "egg-nog," the cure, he declared, being many degrees worse than the disease. But he was invincibly cheerful and talkative, despite an injunction to silence. No inhibition, scarcely even the fear of instant death, nothing short of paralysis of the vocal organ could stay his incessant flow of speech.

"Sic talkin'," Cummy once remarked, regarding him one part in reproof and three parts in admiration. "My certie ye just go like a mill race. Does your tongue never get tired?"

"Made for perpetual motion," he grinned.

"Like a clock that needs no windin' up," said Cummy. "'Deed and I think that's the truth. Nae rest for it this side o' the New Jerusalem, so far's I can see. They say that in the gift o' the gab I'm no that badly off mysel'. but you—losh." And she spread her large motherly hand to express the inexpressible.

Bob and Charlie were daily visitors, sometimes separately, but mostly together; and their visits were always an exhilarating tonic. Having a profound faith in the medicinal effects of laughter Bob came with a fat, podgy volume under his arm wherein the master-humorist had writ of Gargantua and Pantagruel, and read the tale aloud; so that the sickroom became a riot of mirth. In the interest of the patient, whose delight, beginning in chuckles usually ended in explosions, Rabelais had to be banished in favor of milder entertainment. Then Bob talked of Paris with rich and luscious detail that was as manna to the hungering Lewis.

"You lucky devil," he said once, taking fire like tinder. "Only I protest you shouldn't come tempting a decent, douce, sober, prayerful Scot, the darling of old wives of both sexes. I've a good mind to have you indicted for scandalous and blasphemous teaching calculated to seduce the innocent. Then, sir, you'd have a taste of what Scotland can do when she draws the sword of religious persecution."

Bob laughed merrily. "Fire away. One more martyr glorified. Only where's the douce, decent, prayerful Scot?"

"Here," retorted Lewis, slapping his chest. "Only, Heaven be merciful to you a sinner, you're too blind to see. Pray sonny, that the scales may fall from your eyes."

Bob bowed solemnly. "How adorable are truth and modesty! I dote on them—with all their concomitant virtues. Still one never knows. Have you ever heard of what biologists, in their dismal jargon, call a variation from the normal type and slangy people call a sport? Pardon me for asking, but can a Frenchman by any chance have got in among your honored ancestors?"

Lewis sat up with a start of real amazement.

"Now, how the devil did you make that shot?" he cried, his eyes shining. "Just lately I have been making investigations. As it happens there is a legend, dim yet savoring of truth, of a certain barber-surgeon who trimmed the locks and pared the corns of His Eminence Cardinal Beaton, over St. Andrews way. He was French, and, it may be supposed, practised the gallantries of his countrymen in his new sphere. How he got in among our lot is a mystery still unsolved. Our Scottish lasses have never been ice, *vide* Burns and other competent authorities. Mayhap a charming ancestress—I say no more."

"Oh, ho!" said Bob and again, "Oh, ho! Now I see light, now is the puzzle simplifying itself. French gallantry and Scots susceptibility! The very stuff of romance."

Charlie, who had heard something of the legend before, gurgled softly. "There be two things which cannot be hidden," he observed, assuming a Socratic air. "Yea three that will out—heredity, murder, and a man's love for a maid, with incident throes and happenings. And of these some are at this moment greatly agitating the town."

Lewis cocked his ears like a watching ferret.

"And what's the latest?" he inquired, with affected indifference. "Something hot and strong, I hope. I like to think of scandalized looks and secretly walloping pulses."

"Make your mind easy," replied Charlie lightly. "There are scandalized looks and walloping pulses galore." And with more gurglings he recounted some of the tales that were passing from mouth to mouth.

Lewis pretended to sigh dolorously. "So the damnation of Louis Stevenson proceeds apace. Tearing his reputation to rags while he is helplessly on his back, poor devil. There's chivalry for you. Well! here's my appreciation."

And he fired off this triolet.

"Hit a man when he's down
If you'd be in the fashion
In Edina's fair town.
Hit a man when he's down,
And on Charity frown
And on Christian compassion.
Hit a man when he's down,
If you'd be in the fashion."

Bob gave a whoop of delight.

"The very stuff for the *Yellow Un*," he cried. "Give

'em that with a touch of acid added to sharpen the sting, and you have your sensation, and your fortune."

"It would be a public execution," Lewis laughed. "Perhaps with faggots. A heretic, a corrupter of public morals, burning at the stake would be a pleasing sight to some good, charitable Christian folk."

"Oh! they might be satisfied with the stocks," struck in Charlie. "The pillory would give your fellow townsfolk a chance to display their admiration and affection."

"The stocks, the pillory," repeated Lewis. "A pretty picture already in a fair way of being realized. The gibbet too, if they like. What there won't be if this child knows himself," he added with a sudden touch of grimness, "is a lowering of the rebel flag. Take that from me."

Bob and Charlie were delightful. They made time fly. They were the best fellows in the world, comrades, and chums exactly after his own heart. But there were things, dearer and sweeter still, to charm, exhilarate, whirl aloft into the seventh heaven of exaltation. Katie promptly redeemed her promise to write. True, her letter was brief, a mere scrap of a single page, and by no means crowded at that. But then, if brevity is the soul of wit is it not doubly the soul of love? "I love you: I love you." No wearisome long-windedness there: yet how it made the heartstrings thrill! Love was not a theory in ethics, nor a proposition in mathematics to be drawn out, beclouded with words and choked and buried in a dull treatise. Its silences were more eloquent than Niagaras of Speech.

Besides, the poet, inspired by the lover, easily read between the lines, gave color to every word, sentiment to every phrase and filled up the hiatus left by a faltering, maidenly modesty. So read and colored, it was rapturous, and, indeed, if rapture could kill he was in deadly peril.

With the connivance of Charlie (for alas! the correspondence must be strictly clandestine) he sent a burning reply, begging, imploring more. It was not in him to do things cold heartedly or by halves and he let himself go headlong. Katie was adorable, and by all that was sacred she should be his, though gossips wore their malignant tongues out and objectors piled up obstacles sky-high—as they were pretty certain to do.

Yet in the midst of his intoxication he had sharp twinges of remorse. Of certain incidents at their last meeting he thought with a kind of curdling dismay. In spots his recollections were hazy. It was hard to recall just how he had behaved immediately after leaving the howff. Likely, very likely he had been overheated and urgent in his lovemaking. But she would understand, and forgive. She had forgiven.

The later events were vivid as fire in his memory. In the retrospect he found it strange that in the moment of his own direst peril it was of her, not of himself, he thought. Again he saw her white face quivering in sympathy and terror. That sympathy, that terror were the measure of her love for him. And now, as Charlie reported, her fair name was smudged by slimy tongues. The thought brought a furious surge of anger. They, the unctuous hypocrites, the slime-pits, the whited sepulchres, with their sham religion, their public prayers and secret vices, who were they to censure and point the finger?

With a mistaken idea that he was lonely his mother and Cummy took turns in beguiling the tedious hours. Occasionally, too, his father sat with him, a stern, grim, glacial figure whose mere presence chilled the air. Watching and reading signs Lewis sniffed hostility in the air, as one sniffs the approach of thunder in dead calm. He

had no intention of crossing his bridge before coming to it: yet it was a distinct relief when his father rose abruptly with a "Well! good-night. Get to sleep now. Sleep is the best of doctors."

But it is a doctor that is deaf to calling and is never brought by coercion. So it came about that in the watches of the night when deep sleep should have fallen upon him but didn't, Lewis, fevered with thinking, gave himself with excited ardor to a project of which he said nothing even to Bob and Charlie. Satire was amusing. It was great fun to riddle pretentious humbug with the shafts of mockery to an incentive of resounding laughter. But he knew, as a man knows the secrets of his own heart, that there are far, far better, far, far nobler things in that house of many splendors called Literature.

"They talk of dynasties," he said to himself, his blood racing to the spur of a great ambition. "There is only one dynasty that lasts—the dynasty of Genius. All others are as grass, which to-day is and to-morrow is gone. Genius is ageless, ever bright and strong and beautiful like the young-eyed cherubim."

Had he by any chance the tiniest grain of that ineffable, indefinable thing? If not, why had God implanted in his soul those irrepressible desires and ambitions, those dreams and visions that made the jeering of fools and cackling of scandal-mongers no more than the idle buzzing of flies? He had long been trying to find out. Now, by the grace of God had come the opportunity to test himself and prove his quality to the world. Katie crowned Queen of Romance, set forever among the lovely ones of the Earth, so that unborn generations should do her homage—that was the ambition, the glory to be achieved.

"My Katie," he breathed with exultation. "My beautiful, my beloved, my own."

The medium was to be a novel, a novel quick, pulsating with the passion, the joy of radiant first love. He too would make good the boast of Shakespeare. "So long as men can breathe and eyes can see, so long lives this."

One night he was curled up in bed, blanket thrown over shoulders, writing pad on knees, sketching the rapturous picture when the door opened softly and his mother entered in dressing-gown and slippers.

"I saw the light under your door," she smiled reproachfully. "You bad boy! do you know what o'clock it is?"

He glanced at a clock on the mantelpiece.

"Two in the morning," he smiled back at her. "The hour for Dutch courage, they say. It'll be good-morrow to the sun in a little while."

His eyes were alarmingly bright: she shivered at the thought of fever.

"You'll have a temperature again if you're not careful," she warned him, stepping close and laying a hand on his forehead.

"I have it now," was the blithe answer. "Thumping, and what's more, I'm praying it may last. These visitations, my dearest mother, are rare and precious, yea they are nectar and ambrosia."

She smiled in relief. He was not feverish physically, only rather insanely happy and excited over that writing of his. How well she knew those frenzied fits of what he called inspiration. Interesting but terribly exhausting, she always judged.

"And you're sorry to see me, you rascal. Just an old nuisance."

She sat down on the edge of his bed, and with one of his

quick, squirrel-like movements he leaned over and kissed her.

"You darlingest mother," he cooed, laying his cheek to hers. "A nuisance! You! We shall never live to see the day on which that would be true, o' mother of mine."

She ran her fingers absently through his hair.

"That's lovely dearie: but I'm very cross with you all the same. How can you expect to get well behaving like this? Two in the morning. You just kill yourself with this writing."

He laughed lightly. "Did you ever hear what the Cockney girl said when told that her dearest friend died from an overdose of ice cream and hot coffee? 'Lor' wot a lovely death.'"

She laughed with him. "Incorrigible. I wonder if we can ever make you wise, Lou?"

He shook his head, a dancing elfish light in his eye.

"Never, I'm afraid. Solomon could never by any chance have been among my ancestors. It was very, very foolish of you to have such a son."

Thinking of scenes already past and others that were certain to come he almost meant what he said. She let the remark pass.

"Let us see what we can do anyway," she rejoined: and rising she took away his writing material and set it with studied deliberation on a chair in the farthest off corner of the room.

"There, that's something towards a beginning in reform," she observed sweetly. "Two o'clock in the morning is no time for writing, my dear."

With anyone else he would have been annoyed: with her annoyance was impossible.

"You tyrant," he retorted, with all the animation of

good humor. "Well! I'm not in the least sleepy and in revenge I'll keep you prisoner during my pleasure. Come here."

She sat down again on the edge of his bed and he wrapped his own down quilt about her, remarking gayly that even prisoners must not be allowed to catch cold.

"You're almost as foolish as your son," he told her. "Getting out of bed and wandering about half clad at this time of night." He reached for a cigarette and lit it. "Now," settling himself comfortably and beaming on her, "give us your crack."

The crack was wholly about himself, and though it began afar off, he well knew whither it was circling. Inevitably Katie's name was mentioned.

"She was very kind to you, Lou," his mother observed toying with his hand. "Who is she dear? You have never told me."

He looked at her with a sly sidelong expression, wondering just how much she knew or had heard. She gave no sign; but he was under no delusion. The first shot in the coming battle had been fired.

"A very fine, charming Highland girl," he answered. And then, on a deep, excited breath. "Would you like to see her. May she call on you?"

CHAPTER XXV

SHOULD one with delicate reservations in mind, twist and decorate the truth, even suppress it outright, for the sake of honor and fealty?

Your moralist may stay to answer. Your lover never will. Lewis did not.

His mother had a multitude of intimate questions to ask. She did not press; for that she was too wise. In her manner there was nothing of the censor or the grand inquisitor. She spoke in her soft caressing way as if it were the most natural thing in the world that he and she should be there together discussing his interests, his welfare. And her very gentleness, the affection of every tone and look multiplied the difficulties of defence enormously. Two women he loved above all other things on Earth, and one of them was his mother. It was hard, desperately hard to look into her dear face and equivocate. Indeed, there were moments when there surged up within him an impulse to tell her everything, seek her counsel and enlist her aid.

But to be frank with her meant black treason to another. Ay, there was the rub. Could he be a cad? No, never, whatever happened, however he might embroil or defame himself. Katie trusted him, and it was the part of honor, of chivalry, to take care she did not trust in vain. Besides the gentle deception was for the present only. By and by, very soon he hoped, the situation would clear itself, and all would be sunshine and fair sailing. The old, old fond hope you see. To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow. No frosty, nipping winds to-morrow: nothing but flowers

and fragrance, brightness and felicity. Once in the long, long ago, Adam must have felt just so.

With all her gentleness she probed, searchingly, and it needed his utmost ingenuity to parry some of her questions. The young lady, he said, was Highland. Where was her home; what were her people; why was she in Edinburgh? Was she in business or just visiting friends? And how did he happen to meet her? It was skating on thin ice to find convincing answers, but what are wits for if not for tight corners? By a lucky flash he thought of Mairet Fraser and Flora Grant.

"Rather queer how I first heard of her," he replied, smiling softly to himself: and related with due reserve how he fell in with her two friends during that holiday in the West with his father.

You may be sure he repeated their praises in full, plus a bonus.

"That's a good testimonial," his mother admitted warmly. "She must be a nice girl. Isn't it strange how things come about?"

He was on the point of asking if she would like to see Katie's photograph: but checked himself just in time. That would make confusion worse confounded by involving more and ever more hazardous explanations. "Never explain what you do not wish to be understood," counselled an expert in human nature. "Sage advice," thought Lewis. "Aye keep something to yerself. No use flinging things into the melting pot recklessly."

Watching alertly for a chance he deftly cut off questions by chipping in with one of his own.

"How did you like her, Mother?" He spoke with an easy, casual almost indifferent air: but his heart beat wildly for the answer.

"I had hardly more than a glimpse of her," was the reply. "Poor child, she seemed dreadfully upset. She's very young."

"Oh! somewhere round about sweet and twenty, I imagine," said Lewis. "Don't you think she's—rather pretty?"

"I had no time to study her, but I noticed her beautiful eyes. And her hair! what wouldn't many a fine lady give for such luxuriance. I'd have liked to speak more to her. I wonder why she ran away so quickly?"

He explained that she was shy. "Highland people are, aren't they, with strangers?" he said. "But you liked what you saw of her?"

"Very much," was the emphatic answer. "Very much indeed."

Here was a temptation that might have been too much for the blessed St. Anthony himself. Again it was on the tip of his tongue to ask. "Would you like to see more of her?" To gain his mother as a confidante, perhaps a confederate! There lay the chance for a stroke of diplomacy. His arteries drummed: for an instant his eyes were dazzled. But—but—alas! there were so many buts. He must tread with infinite wariness. For behind his mother loomed another figure, portentous, menacing. For a certainty he must tread warily. All at once he gave a cry:

"See, see, the sun. Now aren't we a pair of fools? Off to your bed at once or it's nursing you we'll be. You shouldn't have stayed so long."

She rose smiling, kissed him with an injunction to get to sleep and went.

"The first round," he said to himself, as the door closed behind her. "And—by no means discouraging."

A thrill of jubilation sent his blood spinning. But

immediately other and sobering thoughts succeeded. His mother liked Katie. Excellent. But of the actual state of affairs it was manifest she had no inkling. When the truth came out, as come it must, what then? And what of that other figure that loomed behind her, stern, grim, ominous as a portent of Fate? For a moment the question chilled him. One thing was certain, that there was a terrific fight ahead. He drew a deep, hard breath. Well! well! it was all a challenge to his manhood, his chivalry.

More letters came and went, and more and more; for Charlie made an admirable go-between. Every day Lewis had a little note from Katie: every day Katie had a note, that was not little, from Lewis; if the courier were available more than one. He noted with unbounded joy that Katie's notes showed increasing confidence. He was drawing her out, revealing to herself her gifts of love, of womanhood and of letter-writing. His own letters (unconsciously, perhaps, for the artist was still the artist even in love) were exercises in style, no less than expressions of devotion and adoration. He wished her to understand two things; first that he loved her to distraction, and next that he could give his love the adornment of literary graces. And Katie was quick to mark and understand.

"How delightfully you put things," she wrote, and he underlined the compliment. "It is perfectly lovely. I have never read anything more beautiful in books by famous writers."

He hugged himself deliriously. At last, at last, at last he had found the true critic, the girl who not only loved but appreciated him. And he was right. Two women divined his gifts, telling themselves that beyond doubt he was destined for some exceptional fortune—his mother and

Katie: and Katie's prevision, her intuition of things to come, was the finer and truer. Often in reading she thrilled in pure joy, and not merely over the fervent declarations of her lover. For he laid bare to her his inmost ideals and ambitions, making her by subtle implication a sharer in them; and in her heart she was proud, infinitely proud of the compliment, the finest perhaps that man can pay woman.

"He believes I have some brains and intelligence," she told herself in exquisite delight. "That I have the sense of a rational human being."

In her experience men looked on girls as dolls, playthings or worse. Lewis was above that.

The effect for Lewis was a spur to ambition, a leaping inspiration in the great enterprise. For the novel, that was to immortalize his love was to be no half-baked piece of flummery for the circulating libraries, no mere bonbon of froth, fluff, and sugar-candy for nursery maids in the intervals of flirting with policemen; as little was it to be a clinking of teaspoons, interspersed with the talk of curates, nor yet a pious *vade mecum* for mothers' meetings. No, by the whole width of heaven, no. It was to be an achievement in high art, a glass into which human nature could look and behold itself in the enthralling overpowering grip of passion. And the artistry, ah! the artistry should be a thing to captivate connoisseurs. Not for nothing had he spent endless vigils of torment and delight over the secrets of expression, the power and value of words, their delicate graces and piquant flourishes.

"Style, style, style," he chanted to himself in a glow of intoxication. "The grand antiseptic, the sure and only passport to immortality."

It was almost as much as love: it was infinitely more

than lucre. For it was the very soul of the artist, and therefore literally beyond price.

Those fine frenzies of creation came mostly in the lone hours of night, often with the wind moaning a weird requiem in the chimney or the rain viciously lashing the windows. Throughout the day interruptions were many and distracting. His mother hung long hours doting over him: his father came with disconcerting questions about law studies: Cummy must needs report doings and sayings at prayer-meetings: Charlie brought news of other meetings not graced by prayer? and Bob gave himself up to unredeemed levity.

"Does the peerless one know of these thrilling beatitudes?" he asked once, when Lewis, greatly condescending, read aloud one of his most impassioned scenes.

"More of that, my son, and I shy this Balzac at your head," was the retort.

"Fire away," responded Bob affably. "I have always maintained that the illustrious Honoré is more for the head than the heart anyway, though he did go careering madly all over Europe after a woman. A foible of erotic genius, I suppose. Eros is a naughty little gadfly of a god that stings to no end of folly. If you are wise don't inflate feminine vanity. The girl is charming, but——"

The Balzac went whiz, cutting off the sentence. Bob caught it deftly.

"Want something to read," he remarked, calmly putting the pudgy yellow-back in his pocket. "It shall accompany me back to the land of its birth."

Katie meanwhile lived in a state of mingled joy and terror. She was, indeed, as one who stands bathed in sunshine, yet shrinks with the cold shiver of the brooding

tempest. One minute her happiness was a dazzling radiance; the next her heart was numb with a sense of impending disaster. Often she cowered when no one was near: oftener still she started up at dead of night in icy fear of vague, intangible shapes that were yet most horribly real. Lewis would have told her she was letting her Celtic imagination run riot. She would have smiled, but scarcely believed.

In her clear-sightedness she saw with perfect clarity what her lover was doing, what all lovers do: he was creating an image of impeccable beauty and goodness, and calling it by her name. The reality was something different, quite, quite different, and he would awake from his dream with a shock.

"I am not at all what he thinks me," she told herself a hundred times, and a hundred times reread his letters to prove herself wrong.

Of one thing she was never in doubt. Lewis loved her; and on her part she would go through the fires of Tophet for his sake. But—and here was the crucial question—for his sake dared she accept the love which might have ruinous consequences for him? Would it, she asked herself in an agony of apprehension, would it have been better for both if they had never met?

CHAPTER XXVI

OVERLOOKING Edinburgh from the south there rises a furzy Arcadia, a favorite haunt of lovers and picnickers when summer chances to smile in those inclement regions. There in bright sunshine and a scented wooing wind, Lewis and Katie spent their first charmed hours together after his escape from the imprisonment of the sickroom, a feat accomplished in flat defiance of doctor's orders.

They were on the very spot whence Lord Marmion's enraptured eye surveyed the panoplied hosts outspread on the plain below against a background of smoke wreaths swirling round the " sable turrets " and bleakly picturesque bastions of Walter Scott's " own romantic town." The warrior and the bard are gone, but the smoke wreaths remain, larger and blacker in accordance with modern improvements. True to tradition Auld Reekie keeps its coronal of reek.

But Lewis and Katie had no thought of embattled hosts, or of " gloomy splendor red " or any other color. Had Marmion and his phantom legions come trooping past to blare of trumpet and roll of drum they would scarcely have noticed, so complete is the self-absorption of lovers reunited after enforced separation. As in Eden when the first golden sunshine revealed Adam and Eve to each other there were but two people in all the world, young, wonderstruck, entranced, fresh from Nature's own mint.

For some time (such is the peculiar effect of supreme felicity) they talked little; it was enough to be together, to look into each other's eyes, and there read with unutterable feelings the old, old story that never grows stale.

They walked, not arm-in-arm, but hand-in-hand, as if the electric current must needs pass between them without hindrance or obstruction. Presently Katie chose a seat on the lee side of a thick furze bush and they sat down on cushions of warm, fragrant, sun-dried grass. She had not forgotten their last walk together. Lewis was committed to her care, he was little inclined to take care of himself. Besides he was still pale and rather tottery and, therefore (though he scorned the idea), much in need of nursing.

From their vantage point they beheld, spread out before them in a softly glowing haze, the gray, craggy, steepled city that was so cruel to them both.

"There it lies, picturesque and forbidding," remarked Lewis, with a touch of grimness. "The place that was like to be the grave of everything for me—till I met you, Katie."

She took his hand and held it tightly in both her own.

"Am I then so much to you, Lewis?" she asked, forgetting she had asked the same question before. He took her passionately in his arms.

"My darling, you are all the world to me. I am nothing without you. I don't think you understand how you have transformed my life, made it worth living. And—and Katie——"

"Yes, Lewis?" came in muffled tones from somewhere deep on his breast.

"You love me?"

Suddenly he held her off that he might see her face. An exquisite glow suffused it; her eyes were sparkling stars.

"You greedy boy," she said, trying to laugh. "Haven't I told you that already, more than once, I think?"

"Tell me again," he urged. "Tell me a hundred, a

thousand times, so that I may think of it when I am away from you."

"Then dearest, I love you."

"With all your heart?"

"With all my heart and soul, with every fibre of my being. I have told you that before, too."

"You would do anything for me, go anywhere with me?"

He was looking into her eyes with burning intentness, as if his eternal happiness depended on her answer, as indeed he felt it did.

"I would do anything for you or go anywhere with you, Lewis; and that also is saying over again what I said before." Then in a smothered whisper, as if half in dread of her own confession. "I—I worship you, dear. I think I am wicked—for—you are—my God."

Tears sprang to her eyes: but he did not see them.

"My beloved, my own," he cried in a breathless gulp, suddenly folding her to him. "You and I against the whole world, my brave one."

Against the whole world. Ah! that was it. Even in that moment of delirium he had a flashing vision of what the adverse Fates were spinning. One day soon, any day it might be this throbbing creature in his arms, who nestled and clung to him in boundless love and trust, would be tried as with fire. He felt it, knew it as clearly as if the ordeal were already come. A shuddering tremor, a feeling of mingled fear, tenderness, and pity shot through him, almost making him gasp.

But instantly he put the thought away. No need to anticipate. She was here; she was in his arms. The present was his; for the future he would fight if necessary with his life. If she were fated to pass through the fires

of Moloch he would pass with her. And who knew? they might emerge on the other side with no taint of smoke on their garments. As to parting that was possible on one condition only—that the objectors tore out his living heart. Not otherwise. In an access of fondness he bent over and laid his cheek to her gleaming hair, repeating her name again and again.

By and by they remembered recent events and Katie had a multitude of questions to ask. Lewis treated his illness lightly, according to his wont. Nothing troubled him except the enforced separation from her. Even that was not to be regretted now, since it made reunion all the sweeter.

"And I have a bit of news for you," he told her, his eyes shining with eagerness. "My mother took to you at sight, Katie. She thinks you must be very kind and brave, and like someone else found you very lovely, and didn't I say ditto with all my heart?"

"I think *she* is lovely," said Katie simply. "And I could see by her face she adores you, Lewis."

"Well!" Lewis went on. "The upshot is she wants to see you again. She hadn't a chance to thank you, you know. You'll come to see her."

"Oh!" cried Katie, with a start of fear.

"You must come," added Lewis, as if the matter needed no discussion. "You'll like her. She's A 1; and I know she'll like you, so that's settled."

Katie drew in her breath fearfully. "But—but I'd be afraid Lewis. And then there's your father."

She had heard tales of his father: a hard man by all accounts, a Puritan who ruled with a rod of iron. Moreover, as kind and interested people had many times told her, he disapproved very fiercely, very bitterly of Lewis's

ways and associations. That meant disapproval of her also. No, she could not, dared not face him. And yet if Lewis and she—with a shiver of terror she shut off the thought—and swung to other and more heartening things.

In his letters she observed, Lewis mentioned literary work. Had he been writing in his seclusion?

"A bit," he replied airily. He did not tell her the great secret which beat in heart and brain like a live dynamo: that was to be a surprise a little later; but he could not help skirting it suggestively.

"Guess what you've done?" he said. "You have put it into my head to write a Highland story with a real Highland heroine. What do you think of that?"

She clapped her hands gleefully.

"Oh! that's splendid. You can do it: I am sure of that. You must make her a nice girl. Remember that Highland girls are——"

"Nature's masterpieces," he put in. "Well! she's absolutely the most charming girl in the whole vast range of heroines, a real addition to the picture gallery of beauty. By the way you have never read anything of mine, have you?"

"Only your letters, dear, and you know what I think of them."

"Ah!" he said. "Letters are nothing. Any fat-head can write letters—of a sort. Have a look at this."

He took from his pocket a slim, paper-covered volume and handed it to her, watching her face closely.

"'The Story of the Pentland Rising' by Robert Louis Stevenson," she read, her eyes wide with interest and astonishment.

"Your book," she cried excitedly. "Your book."

He nodded, trying to hide his own excitement. "A

bludgy litle thing about the Covenanters," he explained. "They rather enjoyed wading in gore, you know, for religion's sake. A pretty rum lot, come to think of it."

She was turning the pages with hasty tremulous fingers, dipping into passages, catching at vivid or arresting phrases: then turning back she reread the title page.

"Oh!" she cried. "This is Louis, not Lewis. Did the printer make a mistake?"

He explained that though the local pronunciation was Lewis, the spelling was really Louis, in the French fashion.

"That's stupid," she said decisively. "Lewis isn't right. So from this moment I'm going to call you Louis, French fashion. Lou-ee, Lou-ee." She dwelt on the words, intoning them as if they were ravishing music. "Lou-ee. It's lovely. Ever so much nicer than Lewis When did you write it—Louis?" again turning over and examining the little book.

"Oh! ages ago," he replied, valiantly suppressing all symptoms of pride. "It was published on my sixteenth birthday."

"Your sixteenth birthday. You mean that you wrote it before you were sixteen?" Her eyes were shining with wonder and admiration. "Louis, that's wonderful, splendid. My clever boy, my clever, clever boy."

He grinned complacently. "Don't you think I deserve a special kiss for that and an extra one for bonus?"

She lifted her face instantly. "And I'll kiss this, too," putting the tiny volume to her lips. "Oh! Louis, this *is* a surprise, my dear. You're going to be a famous man, a famous, famous man."

Her words, her tones, her looks were wine and honey. He tingled deliciously. But he must be on his guard against any inflation of pride.

"And how does the flattering sibyl make that out?" he asked, with a bantering smile, that hid a tumultuous eagerness. "That small pamphlet means nothing. Just a boyish fling; the colt kicking up its heels, you know."

"Now don't mock," she retorted, with a delightful pouting frown. "Something tells me—and I'm sure it's right. You're not like anyone else I ever met."

"Unique. The Only," he observed, while vanity purred softly. "Just add that having moulded me Nature broke the mould so that I couldn't be copied."

"You are just—just yourself," said Katie gravely. "I saw from the first you were not the least like the people about us. That's why—but——" she broke off. "I'll tell you that another time. I know in my heart, dear, you are going to be great and famous."

It was on her lips to add, "And what will become of your Katie then?" But she thrust the words back. Why spoil the present with fears of the future which, please God, would prove vain.

Lewis gave his shoulders a dubious shrug. "Well, my dear, all I can say is there's dashed little appearance of it now. Coming events of the kind you predict, cast no shadows before."

"But you haven't had time," rejoined Katie in a tone which rebuked him for being absurd. "Why! you're only a boy yet, and the boy who wrote this before he was sixteen——" She held up the little book with a gesture that declared he was nothing short of a miracle.

She was not flattering him; every word came genuinely from the heart. And taking fire from her enthusiasm he launched into a glowing account of his literary projects and ambitions. Always a good listener Katie was now all rapt attention. Fascinated and inspired he poured out his

plans and hopes and dreams as he had never poured them out to any other living soul, not even to Bob or Charlie. And her eyes told him she understood. Never had vaulting ambition such an enchantress.

"Oh! Louis," she cried breathlessly when he had finished. "This is lovely, lovely. I knew I was right. How clear and beautiful you make things. You make me almost feel I could write things myself."

He was intoxicated. "And you could do it," he returned. "I am sure you could. Look here, let's write together. I'll put in all the raw stuff and you'll put in all the beauty, the poetry. You and I, Katie, think of it, my darling."

Her face was pure rapture. He and she together! She saw the delectable picture with a vividness, and intensity of realization that made her giddy.

All at once his countenance drooped ruefully.

"Well! I need you dearest," he said, drawing her closer to him. "For it's God's truth I get damn little encouragement here; quite the contrary, in fact."

"Edinburgh doesn't know how to appreciate genius," she returned using the word "genius" deliberately and boldly.

"We'll rule out that ambiguous term," he observed. "As a plain everyday fact Edinburgh doesn't cotton to me, Katie."

"That's because people are as blind as bats," said Katie resolutely.

Lewis laughed. "Don't be unfair to the bats. They see at twilight. Some people who pretend to have eyes cannot see the sun at high noon. Listen, I'll give you my beloved city in a sentence—bigotry, snobbery, censoriousness, sermonizing, self-conceit, self-righteousness,

sanctified hypocrisy. Oh! Lord, I'm out of breath with its virtues. But you perceive I'm not one of the elect. It's 'Down, down to hell and say I sent thee thither' for poor me."

"Horrible," cried Katie in a spasm of anger and contempt. "Have they no thought of the teaching of Christ?"

"Even He has been criticized," said Lewis. "You see He ate and drank with publicans and sinners, an unforgiveable lapse. Snobbery can't stomach that sort of low-down conduct. It isn't tony. They'd crucify Him again, with refinements of cruelty all their own if He ventured here. And before that happened every man jack of them would give Him the cold shoulder just to show Him He wasn't their style at all."

"Horrible," repeated Katie, with a shudder of disgust.

"Anyway that's pretty much how it would be," said Lewis. "And as for literary ambition it's damnation pure and simple. To think of adding to the gayety of nations with your pen is to prove yourself an ally of Satan."

He laughed wryly: Katie blazed furiously.

"The blockheads," came from between clenched teeth. "The bigoted, brainless blockheads. Do they think that God means everybody to be as dull and stupid as themselves?"

"They think, my dear, that God means them to be reverenced, deferred to as the Cream of the Earth. Job would have found them great game, for undoubtedly they are the people. If you want to make sure ask themselves."

She edged a hair's breadth closer. "Never you mind, Louis. We're not all like that: and some day they'll be proud of you—as—proud as I am now."

"When it won't matter a snap of the fingers to me,"

said Lewis with unconcealed bitterness. "Bob, who nourishes his soul on satire, predicts that some day they'll be hanging garlands on my bust and doing obeisance. His fantastic imagination even pictures me with a halo. That'll be a sight. A perfectly correct, genteel, respectable, saintly young person; all the tiptop virtues flowering in me. A bit of absolute, flawless perfection. You won't know me. Ye gods! I shall not know myself."

"Well!" he went on after a pause, as she snuggled yet closer. "I want none of their slobbering over my coffin; and meantime, damn them, I'll do what I want to do, and they can go to——"

Something in her face pulled him up. He looked at her curiously half a minute and then added in a changed voice. "This is frightfully egotistical, all about myself and nothing about you. Forgive me, my dear."

He stroked her hair as a man strokes what he loves: its glossy profusion always fascinated him, and now it seemed doubly, trebly beautiful.

"I want to hear what you've been doing during our separation," he said softly. "Any adventures?"

Katie toyed a second with the book in her hand. It was the very question she feared, the very question she would have prevented if she could: but put now it was too direct to be evaded.

"One or two," she answered, with forced lightness.

A sharp tingling sensation went through Lewis, just something quick and electric to make him feel he was alive and interested.

"Ah!" he said. "A pretty girl can't help having adventures. That's the penalty of being pretty. Were they—shall we say—romantic?"

"No, they weren't." The words came with a snap.

All the radiance was gone from Katie's face; the shadow of trouble was in her eyes. Lewis noted the change, with swift deduction of the cause.

"You mean that ——?"

"I mean that you mustn't be thinking what isn't true," Katie struck in. "Or I won't tell you any more."

Again that sharp sensation tingled through Lewis—not jealousy, oh! no, not jealousy, just evidence that he was secretly resolved to have no interlopers. And if you think of it a lover is not less but more a lover for being strictly exclusive. There are treasures no man desires to share.

"Oh! then there are secrets," he remarked, with an inward sting. She laid a hand impulsively on his arm.

"Louis, dear, do you not trust me?"

He looked searchingly into the eyes bent on his own in tense, appealing earnestness. Truth shone in them as clear as the sun above him.

"Yes, sweetheart," he replied. "I trust you to the last iota. Now, what has my little girl to tell me?"

CHAPTER XXVII

KATIE found it hard to get words for what she had to tell him; harder still to control the emotions that made her breast a seething cauldron. But she braced up bravely, telling herself that nothing must daunt her. Cowardice would be contemptible, worse it would be fraudulent. She owed him the truth, the whole, exact truth as it beat and surged in her heart. That dear obligation she would discharge at whatever cost to herself. For without perfect frankness there could be no trust: and trust, his trust, was the foundation of everything Nature made her honest: love made her anxious. It was not in her to practise duplicity, to twist, dissemble, color. So in a low voice and with pathetic little falterings she told the tale of recent events.

Lewis listened, his eyes intent and glowing, his heart beating in a ferment of rapture and pride, ay and of pity. When she told him of the scene with Madam he could contain himself no longer.

"My own," he cried, frantically catching her to him. "All that for me." And he could not help adding with equal ecstasy. "And aspiring sweethearts shunted, given the cold shoulder. My brick, my brave one."

He knew how she would be pursued and visualized with a vividness that made his blood race, how she eluded, beat off pursuers. Trust her? He would trust her among ten thousand temptations, trust her absolutely, implicitly, where, God help him, he durst not trust himself.

She released herself gently. Her face was wet: but, wet with an effusion of pure joy.

"What a brick you are," he repeated. "And you

mustn't think, darling, I was doubting. Only you see, well! it's hands off where you are concerned, and I can't help it. Am I very selfish?"

She smiled at him through tears.

"Delightfully selfish, dearest."

"And am I to go on being selfish?"

"It's the sweetest thing in all the world, your selfishness, Louis."

There was silence after that for a space, the tense, throbbing silence of a smothering embrace.

The delicate question, how Katie was now living came up, and that, too, she told him frankly. For the present she had consented to sing on alternate nights at the howff. They said she was "a big draw" there and Monsieur had increased her honorarium. That enabled her to take a modest room where she could at least be by herself, and with thrift she could make ends meet. There was little prospect of jam, alas! but she could count on bread and butter. And there was always the hope of better things, the hope that springs eternal in the most unfortunate of human breasts.

"And with your love, dearest," her eyes said. "Have I not reason to be happy?"

Secretly she wondered if he realized all that he meant to her in ways not to be expressed. And he regarding her with a flood of tenderness, thought how lovely she was, how true, how brave, how sorely tried: in particular, how sorely tried. What were the mad gods thinking of that they could be so heartless, so cruel?

One small hint dropped incidentally went to his heart like an arrow. But for the joy of being with him she would have fled from the eyes of all who knew her and hid herself forever among strangers, perhaps in some far

land. That meant what it made him giddy to think of. But why was she troubled, persecuted? He knew, and knowing cursed his own sex as beasts of prey ever on the prowl for trust and innocence. It was pitiable, damnable.

How he wished he were rich, to make her inviolably, legally his own. Money she would not accept from him now, even if he had it to give. Nor was it money he desired to offer. Yet it was that bogey of an empty purse that prevented him from carrying out the most ardent desire of his heart. As his wife she could defy them all, hold up her head in face of the whole world. Oh! that infernal, that thrice cursed poverty which balked and humiliated him at every turn.

Once Katie swore to herself that no living soul should ever know another story that was sealed up in her heart. She would go down to the grave with shut lips. Some day, it might be long, long hence, perhaps a million years, perhaps ten million, when the Books were opened and the Judge of all the universe took His seat at the Grand Assize, then it might be the tale could be told in the courts of Heaven and tardy justice would be done. But on Earth it was to be silence.

Now she was determined to revoke that oath almost as if it were blasphemy. For a miracle had happened. Out of the abyss an unseen hand had plucked her; suddenly, as by magic, her life was irradiated, warmed to an ineffable glow, by a gift, the greatest, divinest of gifts, direct from God Himself. Not all the oaths in the world would induce her to turn from it or treat it lightly, far less to throw it away. She looked at Lewis long and ardently and never, surely, were hero and lover so glorified in the eyes of an adoring woman.

"Louis," she said, trembling with happiness and fear. "Louis—I—want—to—tell you something else."

He laughed. "About a man, eh?"

"Yes."

"What man?" asked Lewis, with the indifference of perfect bliss.

She was quivering. Fear and shame were in her eyes. Noticing her too evident distress Lewis made a gay, laughing gesture.

"Look here, O' Mistress Mine, I have no option but to be downright rude. For as sure as I love you, sweetheart, I refuse to listen. Good Lord! what have I to do with the confessional box? Away with the idea."

But Katie was not to be put off. She came resolved to tell him everything and meant to abide by her resolution.

"But—dear—listen," she was protesting.

"Deaf," interjected Lewis. "Stone deaf. No use wasting words on a deaf man, eh?"

"It was a doctor," said Katie, still persevering and still quivering.

"A doctor," repeated Lewis, almost betrayed into curiosity. But he pulled himself up promptly. "A doctor, you say. A skunk maybe like some of his kind. Hullo! Whew, the devil take it."

He sneezed violently. Katie sprang to her feet in alarm.

"We are silly to sit so long," she cried. "Come."

She held out her hand. He caught it and would have detained her; but with imperious fondness she repeated. "Come—rise at once," and pulled him to his feet.

"Es-hew! Good thing my head is well fixed on. My lady, if I wasn't sneezing I'd make you pay up."

"You're to do what I tell you," she retorted. "And do it quickly. Come along."

Lewis laughed gayly.

"Right-about-turn. Quick march," quoth the drill-sergeant.

An hour or so later, after a cozy, jolly little tea in the sylvan quiet of Morningside under the shoulder of the Braid Hills they entered Princes Street near its western end where Edina's fashion parades gorgeously in last year's Paris and Bond Street styles. For various prudent reasons Katie proposed they should part there, but Lewis abjuring prudence as the wisdom of weaklings scoffed away the suggestion.

"Afraid of Mrs. Grundy?" he inquired in high feather, for the afternoon had been glorious. "Don't be timid, or shake at the knees. Perhaps the lady is indoors to-day taking care of her complexion."

Though reluctant (for his sake) Katie yielded and very much together they walked down Edinburgh's show boulevard, challenging all eyes, as it seemed wantonly. Both knew what they were risking; but while her smile was tremulous and fearful, his was gayly and openly defiant. Let Mrs. Grundy come in all her starched censoriousness. And sure enough Mrs. Grundy came. They had not gone fifty yards when Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld hove in sight, bearing down on them like an ancient clipper in full sail; beside her was Jessie, whom Lewis, as we know, once feloniously kissed under cover of a porch. As they approached Lewis could see mamma stiffening to the proper pitch of disdain; he could also see the color flooding into Jessie's face.

"I wonder if they'll cut me?" he thought. "Very likely."

They did, at any rate Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld did very pointedly and pompously. On she bore haughty, expansive, her nose tilted, her corsets creaking like strained harness, and with a devastating side-glance at Katie, swept by like a Spanish galleon, conscious of nothing save her own pomp and pride. But in passing Jessie inclined her head ever so slightly and gave Lewis one swift furtive look, as if she could not help it, poor girl, and Lewis winked back with a whole wicked world of meaning, making her face flame a yet deeper crimson. Katie noticed, but asked no questions, nor did she make any remark. Only her eyes flashed in resentment of the insult to her lover.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MRS. GRUNDY, alias the fat, puffing, pompous Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld! Lewis laughed scornfully. What was Mrs. Grundy to him, however much he might be to Mrs. Grundy? "They may go to—but I'll go to my Anna," he told himself, recalling the disdainful defiance of another Robert greatly famed in the annals of gallantry.

He looked at Katie walking silent and reflective by his side.

"Enjoyed yourself this afternoon, haven't you, sweetheart?" he asked.

She smiled at him. "Need you ask, Louis?"

"Then if this bit of glorious weather holds we go again to-morrow where we've been to-day. All other engagements cancelled—and no objections please. Seize the opportunity as it comes; that's the golden rule in love, eh? This is our time."

"And we're not going to miss it," his eyes added.

Accordingly next afternoon, fair weather aiding, they returned to their furzy Arcadia. Unhappily they found a boisterous holiday crowd in possession, filling the air with harsh, strident noises that tore the ear.

"Why," Katie inquired, "are Edinburgh voices so often shrill and piercing?"

"Oh! haven't you found out?" answered Lewis, who resented this mob-invasion of the green-and-gold seclusion which ought to be kept inviolate for lovers. "Two causes, my dear. East winds and ill nature."

"But," protested Katie, "these people don't seem ill natured. They're just overflowing with high spirits."

He made a wry face. "Scratch 'em and you'll soon find the Tartar. Wish the unsavory beasts had stayed at home."

She rebuked him gayly with the reminder that others had natural rights to recreation and enjoyment: but just then he cared nothing for abstract rights or the pleasures of others.

"All right, my altruist," he agreed. "Let 'em yell and screech till their abominable lungs burst. I'm not out for the joy of witnessing their High Street manners. Reminds me of 'Appy 'Ampstead as I once saw it with 'Arry and 'Arriet on the loose, only worse. Come, it's you I want, my love, not them. A corner somewhere by ourselves."

After some searching they found a nook not yet invaded and took possession.

"Ah!" cried Lewis, throwing himself on the warm grass. "How sweet are nature and privacy when the greasy mob gambols and roars. Sit by me, Katie, close, close."

He rolled and lighted a cigarette; then drawing up his legs and clasping his knees with both hands he let the torrent of talk flow, with Katie sitting a silent, rapt, enchanted listener.

"By the way," he broke off suddenly. "You promised to teach me Gaelic. Now's the chance."

She responded eagerly.

"Very well. Only mind you must be a good boy and do what teacher tells you."

"I'm as docile as a lapping cat," he answered. "Fire away."

It was great fun trying to imitate her, to catch her inflection, her intonation, to master guttural sounds and

work his tongue over and round what he called crabbed masses of consonants.

"No, no," she would tell him, with charming impatience. "You're not supposed to chew and swallow the words. See, like this." And she would pout and purse her lips so seductively that every moment the lover threatened to thrust out the pupil. But he struggled on bravely, having a real desire to learn.

"I see," he would reply, making a clucking, choking sound somewhere deep down in the thorax. On her lips every word was a note of music; on his it appeared to be something between the cawing of a crow and the croaking of a frog.

"My lowland tongue can't get the knack of it," he remarked after many attempts ending in a burst of mirth.

"You stupid," she chided in bubbling laughter. "Why, it's quite easy. Listen." And she pursed her mouth to the semblance of an articulate rosebud. The temptation was too much: and there was a passionate interruption of studies.

"You—you are quite impossible," she told him in fond rebuke, freeing herself from his arms.

He lay back smiling at her.

"Lazy, my love, lazy and very, very happy. 'Tis pleasant to be schooled in a strange tongue by female lips and eyes—That is, I mean, when both the teacher and the taught are young. Byron found that out. Only I'm just making a fool of myself by talking Arabic in the house of a Moor. Tell me some of your rousing Highland stories instead."

It was his turn to listen entranced as she told tales of her own people, tales that were a queer melange of weird superstitions, uncanny legends, heroism, romance, ele-

mental things of joy and terror, love, hate, strife, triumph, tragedy, heartbreak, invincible loyalty. She related all with the gripping power of sincerity and unquestioning belief in the truth, the literal truth of what she told.

"By Jove," exclaimed Lewis, tingling with delight, admiration and something that was almost envy. "How you do tell a story. I'd give my right hand to have your gift, I would, upon my honor."

"You mustn't make fun of me," she returned. "Any shepherd in the Highlands could tell the old stories ever so much better than I do."

"Then," rejoined Lewis emphatically, "all I can say is that it's jolly lucky for professional story-tellers that Highland shepherds don't take to writing. Have you ever tried to write stories, Katie?"

"Oh! just little things at school," she answered. "I had to hide them from teacher."

"Because teacher was an ass," commented Lewis crisply. "Have you kept any of them?"

She shook her head.

"What a pity," said Lewis. "I'd give anything to see those stories by the little schoolgirl. They were Highland of course?"

She nodded, observing that he was wonderfully interested in everything Highland.

"For that," he replied slowly. "There are two reasons, my Katie. First you are Highland and all the world to me. Next I like to think that I am Highland myself, more or less. I believe I have the honor to be the scion of a proscribed clan. Ah! that surprises you. In a left-handed way I count Rob Roy among my ancestors."

Katie was suddenly palpitating with excitement.

"Rob Roy," she cried in a gasp of amazement. "My

dear, my dear. Now I know why you are so different from all the people here."

He explained his fancied descent from the redoubtable MacGregor, so far as he knew or guessed the particulars. Katie listened breathlessly, her eyes fixed on his face in sheer fascination. This discovery, this great and wonderful discovery, seemed to bring Louis much, much closer to her. Their affinity was a natural affinity of blood and race. Now she really understood why he was so much interested in the Highland.

And he was going to be a famous, famous man, a glory to himself, and all related to him. She looked at him adoringly, every fibre of her body, every faculty of her mind dancing in joy. For a woman's dreams of the man she loves are a Jacob's ladder to the highest heaven of honor and felicity.

They had to beat a precipitate retreat from their Eden: for in their self-absorption they did not notice black storm-clouds driving heavily from the west. Already the wind had an ominous whistle and a chilly edge. The darkened sky was contracting, the triple hump of the Pentlands had disappeared; the crown of Arthur's Seat was barely visible in the mist and the "Sapphire islands of the Forth" were no longer sapphire but vague, dim blots on the landscape.

"It's best foot foremost if the rain isn't to catch us," Lewis remarked casting a look westward. "Was ever such a climate? Come, a sprint for the old lame-horse 'bus at Morningside."

They sprinted down the shaggy, bumpy slope among other sprinters equally bent on escaping the storm, and after a hard scramble secured seats. At the Princes Street terminus they parted circumspectly, having made "other

arrangements." That night Katie was to sing at the howff; but Lewis, though protesting fiercely, was forbidden to be present. Secretly she had resolved that if she could help it he should hear her no more in that noisome den.

He had scarcely got indoors when torrential wind-driven rain was lashing his windows.

"I wonder what grudge Heaven has against my beloved city to curse it with such a climate," he remarked to himself, looking out on the multiplying puddles. "Has Earth anywhere a viler?"

He thought of Katie and his own noble aspirations: but, ugh! who could be blithe or gay, or creative in this gray, pouring dreariness? It was a night, the lorn lover felt, not for carols but for dirges, and wailing threnodies, something dark, suicidal, Byronic, that should express the very soul of disgust and blackness. Yet when some time later Bob and Charlie looked in on him, in the beaten way of friendship, they found him anything but tragically engaged.

"Hullo, you fellows," was his hilarious greeting. "You're in luck. Just in time to witness the birth of a masterpiece."

"The pangs of parturition, poor soul," grinned Bob.

"Avaunt flippancy, down with levity," was the retort. "Know ye, my brothers, what lyric beauty means? Has enchantment ever stirred mystically in your besotted breasts, or the ineffable brought your souls up with a gulp?"

"Never that I know of," answered Charlie. "What's the matter?"

"The matter? What's your ear measurement that ye be so prosaic? But listen and be charmed. The gem of song now upon the anvil—forgive mixed metaphors—is

not quite finished and polished. Nathless, my brave bucks, ye may taste its quality." And with a jaunty, whimsical air which was yet profoundly serious he began to recite:

"There's rain on the Pentlands,
There's mist on the sea.
Edina lies shrouded."

"Meteorologically correct," murmured Bob. But the poet unheeding swept on:

"But sunshine for me,
Beams bright in the beauty
Of eyes I adore."

He paused with a quick, inquiring upward glance.

"As far as I've got. Now what rhymes with adore?"

"Snore," answered Charlie promptly.

"Simple, sensuous, passionate," said Lewis. "Fulfils Milton's conditions to a T. Only love doesn't snore, you ass."

"Oh! doesn't it?" rejoined Charlie. "Then love doesn't survive the honeymoon, that's all. You should have heard a seven days' bridegroom where I was putting up on holiday. He kept the whole bally place awake with his snoring. It was like the blowing of a sperm whale."

"Don't know anything about sperm whales and their blowing," retorted Lewis, gnawing his pen for inspiration. "What I want, my dear fellow, is a rhyme."

"What about 'encore'?" suggested Bob, thinking of ovations at the howff. "Seems appropriate."

"The top of admiration to you," scoffed Lewis. "Ye be rhyming experts both."

"All right," said Bob sweetly. "If I were doing it I'd get in something chic about lips as well as eyes. Pretty important in love's litany, I judge. 'There's kames 'o honey 'tween my love's lips.' That's the idea. And don't

for your life omit Cupid: never do to omit Cupid, the little devil with the bow and arrow. He's at the back of all the mischief."

"Ye-e-s," said Lewis, concentrating with a fine frenzy. "Well! how does this go?" he asked a minute later.

"And lips steeped in honey,
From Cupid's own store."

"Trump," cried Bob. "An A1 rhyme, A1. First rate. Cupid, kisses, honeyed lips. Yum, yum. Well! go ahead up the slippery braes of Parnassus, O' poet."

Once more Lewis bent in an ardor of inspiration and presently he read aloud:

"There's no happy lover
With me can compare.
For my winsome lady
Is kind as she's fair."

"Ah! hem!" said Bob with a critical screw of the face. "True to fact, I'm sure. Accurate as a bluebook or a tailor's bill. But——"

"Oh!" Lewis cut in. "I suppose you'd ask in your superior cynical way, where's the poetry?"

Bob bowed politely.

"Can't always be twiddling the top note of passion," said Lewis. "Must have relief. Art, sir, art. Besides, I'll come back on that and tighten it up a bit. Now for the finale."

And after a supreme effort he read out in triumph:

"Her arms are my Eden,
My kingdom of bliss.
My title to Heaven
Is sealed with her kiss."

"Sealed with her kiss," repeated Bob, with solemn archness. "*Je suis enchanté, M'sieur.* And you jolly well

bet she'll be the same. Fit to fetch anything in petticoats; only don't inflate feminine vanity too much."

"She's not vain," said Lewis, getting to his feet in a vibrating afterglow.

"Not vain, but open to pleasant truths," observed Bob, still with his air of serious banter. "Of course the dears deserve a little honey now and then. It sweetens them. And it's mighty interesting to watch the muse at work. Never guessed her task was so arduous."

Lewis gave a gay, scoffing laugh. "Just thought the poet turned on a mental tap and the stuff gushed—pure molten gold. Ask Mr. Tennyson about that, old son."

Setting poetry abruptly aside Charlie intervened with something much nearer his heart.

"Get on your toggery," he said abruptly. "And come out."

"And the wherefore of the why for that peremptory order?" Lewis inquired. "What's the lark?"

"Bob's going," was the laconic answer.

Lewis paused, looking quickly from one to the other.

"Going?" he cried. "Bob going?"

"At once," said Charlie.

Lewis whistled as though for once words failed him. He knew that Bob must go soon, but this sudden threat of deprivation in a moment of divine delight came with a sort of curdling jar. Even when we are waiting for it the expected has a way of jarring us at last. As he looked distressed Bob hastened to explain.

"London and Paris calling, my boy. So like the Arab I fold my tent unostentatiously and skip. Couldn't dream of interrupting you in the agonies, I mean the ecstasies of a love song. Now that the fit's over and life's little ironies resume their sway I regret to say I am recalled.

So it's ta-ta to the never-sufficiently-to-be-extolled delights of Edina. Heigh ho! didn't some sapient wiseacre discover that all things come to an end?"

"And naturally we want to celebrate," put in the practical Charlie, bent on his own purpose.

"Naturally," agreed Lewis, still a trifle dazed. "And the form of the celebration?"

Charlie chuckled deeply. From Lewis the question was comically absurd.

"Oh!" he answered. "A blow-out on shandy-gaff, ginger-pop or some other equally potent liquor."

"Extravagance, wanton, indefensible extravagance," Lewis grinned, switching into the comic vein. "And the place my festive prodigal?"

"Bob would relish a farewell taste of French," replied Charlie, "You know where that is to be got."

A queer tingling sensation went through Lewis as he visualized the scene should he comply.

"Not to-night—for me," he said with some emphasis.

Charlie gazed at him with wide eyes.

"Oh! have we lost our appetite for cakes and ale?"

Lewis lighted a cigarette and took a turn about the room, smoking vehemently.

"Have you ever given your promise to a lady and kept it?" he asked, halting abruptly.

Charlie gurgled. Lewis was really getting comic. He would be parading conscience next. After that he would be setting up as a Paladin *sans peur et sans reproche;* a blooming model for Sunday schools, the subject for a tract. It was too ludicrously funny.

"I'm never quixotic if I can help it," he answered, his eyes twinkling.

"Well!" said Lewis, and his face was grave. "She's

singing there to-night. So I have given my promise to keep away, and though you'd scarcely believe it, I mean to play the game strictly according to Hoyle."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Charlie, thoroughly taken aback. "Well I'm——"

With a burning sense of wrong he inveighed against the folly, the utter, unspeakable imbecility of allowing feminine whims to interfere with masculine pleasure. The howff was the place; the only place. In fact he had already taken the precaution to square the garlic-eating Frenchman. At that very moment preparations were afoot for a jolly little jamboree that would leave a taste in Bob's æsthetic mouth for many days. And on second thoughts an accompaniment of vocal music would surely be an added delight.

"To have her sing while we booze?" said Lewis, arching his eyebrows.

Charlie did not deny the inference.

"Get thee behind me, Satan," observed Lewis, pleasantly but firmly. "Not for a thousand pounds, my dear fellow, and God only knows my pitiable state of impecuniosity. But honor, Charlie, the bubble honor. There, don't explode, I'm not going to preach. Only mark you nothing on earth could induce me to break my word to a certain little girl. That's definite, sonny."

"Oh! damn women," spluttered Charlie. "They spoil everything, they do, upon my soul they do. Now, what the devil——?"

"Hush," interjected Bob with an amused smile. "Profane not the venerated name of Venus, Queen of Joy, or she'll take it out of you as surely as she's taken it out of many another noble puissant piece of manhood. If

Samson was not strong enough, nor Solomon wise enough, nor Nelson brave enough to withstand——"

Charlie affected to groan dismally.

"Oh! dear a homily on the terrors of woman. We must get you a church at once."

"Then see you make it big," rejoined Bob amiably. "For the gospel of Venus expounded with appropriate illustrations would be the most popular the world has ever known. No fear of empty pews in that kirk, *mon cher.*" Then turning to Lewis he asked, "At what hour does the prima donna come on?"

Lewis did not know, but he thought it likely she would prefer to get the ordeal over as early as possible; in fact he was sure she would.

"Then," said Bob with the bland air of the proved diplomat, "what of the blessed word 'compromise'? 'Tis a word of high lineage, and vastly in favor with kings, courtiers, politicians, gamblers—and lovers. Many a threatened face is saved; many a cause *celebre* averted by it's aid. Would our *preux chevelier* think it inconsistent with the delicate dictates of honor to look in when the lady's turn is over, that is when she is gone?"

Before Lewis could answer Charlie gave a whoop of delight.

"The very ticket," he cried, every trace of a frown gone from his face. "The problem's solved. By gosh, Bob, you ought to be a lawyer. Honor saved, promise kept, pleasure assured, all serene and everybody virtuous and happy. All that remains to be settled is what and where for the next two hours."

That too was soon settled, Lewis (now that honor was safe) in an instant leaping from opposition to eagerness. Bob, the dearest, wisest, wittiest, most original fellow

alive must have due tribute. First there would be a delectable little supper in the right quarter: and "three blither lads that lee lang night" they swore, should not be found "in Christindee." What if there should be headaches on the morrow? When did youth and jollity ever stay to think of to-morrow's headache?

For Lewis the plan involved an interview with his mother, on the ever recurring financial question. As it happened (opportunely for his venture) his father was absent at the moment. The interview had therefore all the success he desired, with a bonus paid in advance for good conduct and affection.

"Of course, dear," his mother said handing out what Lewis playfully called the dibs. "Of course you'll be wise and not overdo things." Her eyes said, fondly, wistfully, "That's apt to be your weakness, you know."

"Of course," answered Lewis, with the utmost cheerfulness and confidence.

"And you'll get back in good time," she added. "You know how uneasy your father gets when you're out late."

"Of course," repeated Lewis. "Of course."

And thus assured she saw the trio off with a smiling injunction to be good boys.

CHAPTER XXIX

AS LEWIS surmised Katie wished, as a general arrangement, to sing early and escape. But Monsieur knew his business. In the beginning while she was on trial he humored her: but when she suggested that the plan of early hours should be continued he smiled politely but pityingly at her simplicity. Ah! *non, non:* did she not see that the *piece de resistance,* the star-turn must be kept to the end?

"*Ruse de guerre M'selle,*" he grinned, showing his yellow teeth meaningly. *Entre nous,* it was the golden rule in their business. With a little chill Katie noticed how subtly he stressed the assumed partnership. A good start! *oui, oui.* Oh! yees, yees, but it was the finish, the wind up that mattered most. To send people away hilarious, enthusiastic, wanting more and ever more. Den dey coom back; and there lay the secret of full coffers.

In expounding his astute, worldly-wise axioms he was very gracious, very flattering. He would be quite frank with her. She was the culminating attraction, the star, vot you call de beeg draw: and rubbing his hands, he delicately indicated that to be a beeg draw in his establishment was to have one's fortune made. And M'selle should not blush at being cheered and praised. It did not pay, de ting called modesty. A little dash of, vot you call it? saucy impudence, was very fetching. A bold smile, a challenge of the eyes, ah! who could reckon their value? As a friend he counselled her to make the most of her charm, her beauty, grace and gift of song—which was divine. She had but to go on under his skilled direction to have the

town at her feet. *Eh bien!* After that she could pick and choose.

Katie contemplated the dazzling prospect with a shudder of horror and despair. With excruciating acuteness she felt the force, the bitterness of Monsieur's subtle temptation. It was as if the serpent searched out her sorest need and lured where she was least able to resist. On his conditions she might have the cake, the pastry of life—for a time. That she knew as well as he did. Oh! yes, she could sell her beauty, her womanhood and for a little while enjoy all the grandeur, all the luxuries of gilded degradation. And then? She almost reeled at the question. Horrible, horrible beyond thought, beyond expression.

And Louis? Was she to take the tempter's bait and lose all she had won? A savage resentment thrilled through her. No, by God's help, no. She would keep what she had got, cling to it as the wrecked sailor clings to his raft in a drifting, surging sea of darkness. "Louis, Louis," her heart cried out, and it seemed that fire flashed before her eyes. She felt herself grasping him, holding on to him. Then, with a great breath, she was in his arms. She was safe.

Steadying herself, she realized one thing with deadly clearness that for the present Monsieur did not need her half so much as she needed him. For he represented bread and butter, to say nothing of things too dear, too precious to be put into words even to herself. So that night she sang at the hour appointed by the superior power, and, as it seemed, with greater éclat than ever.

In a street near by a rollicking chant rose in chorus to a catchy music-hall air, slithered into shrill laughter, re-

covered and went on yet more loudly with an "all together" swing:

"He's a bould bad man
From the town of Mullingar,
The town of Mullingar,
Oh! Mullin—Mullingar.
He's a bould bad man
From the town of Mullingar,
Oh! a bad, bad man—
From the town of Mullingar."

The impromptu variant of an old song ended in a screaming discord that made two constables halt on their beat to consider the situation and await developments.

"Och! the darlint," cried a lady of the party, who had started the song and led the singing. "The darlint, it's makin' love to the girls he'd be and isn't it wishin' I am, I was back among the bhoys wid their tongues av honey and their swate blarney?"

She was a stranger with a creamy Irish brogue, and the novelty of unfamiliar airs and graces. Once she must have been dangerously pretty; even now she retained remnants of the black, piquant Castilian beauty which in certain coastal parts of Ireland recalls the ancient gallantry of Spain.

"So the sweet Colleen Bawn is homesick for the boys of her own land," remarked Lewis, with a seductive, sidelong grimace. "Rare experts in the fine art of lovemaking, eh?"

She held his left arm (because it was nearest his heart, she said): to the right clung a local rival who, being piqued, exerted all her charms to crush out foreign competition. In that most enviable, most delectable position he carried himself with the fine jaunty swagger natural to the man who is the idol of adoring, competing ladies. His head was high, his hat cocked at a rakish angle, his eye

bright, his face flushed; and if at times his gait wavered or showed a sudden tendency to zig-zag the guardian angels just tightened their hold the more endearingly. Close behind Bob and Charlie followed with a miscellaneous escort, mostly female, attracted by the resounding mirth of the party.

The Colleen laughed her gayest. "Homesick. Och, sure and it's there the bhoys are the bhoys."

"Beat us Scotch at the great game, eh?" said Lewis, preening himself as though to say; "You talk, but look at me."

"The Scotch," she gurgled. "Oh! Mother av Moses, savin' yer presence, yer honor," and she made him a roguish ironical little duck. "Need a man say grace just because a girl lets him kiss her? It's mighty cautious wid their fun, the Scotch are."

The opposite rival could not help indulging in a little trill of derision. "I wonder you ever bothered comin' near them. What brought you?"

"Phwat brought me?" came in the creamy Hibernian laugh. "I'll just be afther asking ye a riddle, Cushla Mochree. Phwat sint the divil to hell?"

"Not having the sense to let well enough alone," interposed Lewis, with a grand magisterial air.

"Faith," remarked the creamy, gurgling voice. "As ould Larry McGunn said when his cow died av the evil eye 'tis a mortal bad complaint. The poor ould divil wanted too much, kicked up a shindy and got kicked out."

"As related at large by Mr. Milton," said Lewis. But the reference passed unnoticed. The Colleen knew nothing of Mr. Milton, and had no present desire for information.

"'Tis sad to think av," she observed sweetly. "Still an' all phwat'd loife be widout a bit av divarsion? 'Tis the saisonin' that makes the dish tasty"

"Phee-lo-sophy, bai Jove," cried Lewis, giving a lurch to leeward.

"Aisy me jewel, aisy," cautioned the Colleen, tightening her grip. "Be mindin' yer steps. 'Tis the rocky road to Doblin, for shure; and that same is the best and purtiest road God ever made."

"Oh, ho," guffawed Charlie, who as leader of the expedition, had pushed to the front. "So God makes the roads in Ireland. That's news."

"Shure and isn't it God's own counthry?" returned the Colleen mellifluously.

"Then I'd be going back there," chipped in the rival with a snort. Hers was the patriotic sentiment, "Scotland for the Scotch"; with the special addendum, "We can look after our men without Irish interlopers, thank you."

The Colleen laughed good-humoredly.

"Faith an' 'tis the good advice, entoirely, my dear. Ould Oireland the home av the blessed Sints an' all that's good an' purty. Will ye be for comin' wid me, my love?" she asked with a ravishing, provoking look at Lewis.

"You'd rather be where you are, wouldn't you, Velvet Coat?" cooed the siren on the other side.

Lewis looked from one to the other, as if judging their comparative attractions.

"How happy could I be with either, were t'other dear charmer——" A hiccough broke the flattering quotation.

"Here we are," Charlie called gleefully, as one who has carried off a darling *coup*.

They were at the opening of the mephitic close which formed the murky vestibule of the howff. As they halted a second there came from within a sudden explosion of applause which made wall and roof and even pavement vibrate.

"Just in toime for Lannigan's ball," observed the Colleen. "Faith an' it's here they're havin' the fun."

"Come on," cried Charlie, sniffing revelry as the war horse sniffs battle.

But before he had gone three yards there broke a wild commotion about the door. For an instant it seemed a scuffle of contending bodies and inarticulate voices. Then with a quick movement as of fear or anger a slim girlish figure detached itself and came towards them, swiftly like one in flight. Unceremoniously disengaging himself Lewis sprang to meet her. At sight of him she drew up with a gasp.

"Oh!" she said in a low voice, her hand pressed to her heart: and again, "oh!"

With a lightning glance she took in his companions; then her eyes came back to Lewis, standing ambiguously in the dimness of a feeble gas lamp. Her face contracted with pain. "Why, oh! why are you here?" her expression asked. But Lewis, drawn up to a majestic, if not quite steady pose, turned to a group of figures behind.

"Don't trouble, gentlemen," he said, with a magnificent gesture meant to signify that the hero, the lover had arrived and the lady was beyond their reach.

Some one shouted ironically, "Congratulations. Good for Velvet Coat." And snickering audibly the pursuers turned and went indoors.

Katie moved away hurriedly as if to end the scene. A jeering reference to her singing and her fine airs from two of the girls sent the Colleen to her side with the remark:

"So it's you that's the singer. I was just too late to hear you: but it's plain you been an' gone an' done it. An' the bhoys afther ye, too, like yelpin' beagles. 'Tis enough to make a girl vain."

Katie did not stay to answer. Suddenly sick at heart she was not thinking of ovations, though that night the enthusiasm had exceeded all previous experience. The present encounter shocked her: made her excited, confused,

and wretched. Her one thought, her one purpose was to get away, to be by herself and hide her shame and pain. Some quick impulse, some spark of sympathy or understanding impelled the Colleen to step out with her. On the other side was Lewis, tuning up as it were for what he felt was a great and rare performance. The trio had gone perhaps thirty paces, when Katie stopped abruptly.

"You must go back to your friends," she said addressing Lewis. There was something of disgust and indignation, but more of misery in her tone. Why was he here after promising to keep away? And his company! Was it deliberate treachery? Was it meant to hurt? She could have cried with disappointment and vexation.

Lewis gave his anæmic moustache a cavalier twist.

"After seeing you home, my dear," he replied. His manner was debonair, gallant, ingratiating, though there was some little difficulty in coördinating speech and bearing. Katie looked at him, unspeakable things in her eyes.

"No," she said decisively. "You must go back. I will go home alone."

Glancing swiftly from one to the other, the Colleen drew her own conclusions.

"Swatehearts," she observed mentally. "Swatehearts and a rumpus brewing. The girl's upset dreadful, poor dear." She sympathized deeply. Ah! these men, these heartbreaking, indescribable men.

Laughing like the cavalier he felt himself, Lewis scouted the idea.

"Let you go home alone, Queen of my heart! that's likely. No sweet, it canna, shana, winna be."

So he was on the blindly obstinate tack. Katie tried the coaxing tone; but he obdurately refused to turn back. As they argued some one passed who looked at them sharply, and in the shadows ahead halted to watch. Katie bit her lip. To object further, to insist on her own way

would merely provoke a scene, and for a hundred reasons that was to be avoided. As she hesitated Lewis took her arm.

"Come," he said with an air of authority. "The sooner you're home the sooner I'll be back."

It was idle to oppose him.

"You're very insistent," she said. "Very well." Then turning unexpectedly to the Colleen. "You come, too. It'll add to the fun."

Having won so far Lewis made no objection, and the trio set off, he walking with glorious elation between the two. The figure in the shadows slunk back, waited till they had passed, crossed the street and followed furtively on the other side. By the time they had reached her destination Katie had recovered her normal manner and temper, at any rate outwardly.

"Now," she said smiling upon Lewis. "You have done your duty. Get back quick."

Her tone was playful and intimate, and Lewis, fancying he understood the whole free-masonry of love was effulgently compliant.

"A kiss then," he said, and his arm was about her.

She stood watching as the pair went off. The Colleen was chattering volubly, yet she had an eye for the girl behind. All at once she turned and ran back.

"Don't you be goin' an' disthressin' yerself, my dear," she said in a breathless whisper. "He is as safe wid me as wid the Sints in glory. And wid the others too," she added. "Trust me for that."

She kept her word, not without the exercise of artfulness, and sometime near the dawn Lewis went to sleep in Bob's hotel.

CHAPTER XXX

MADAM RUMOR, myriad tongued Rumor, devoted herself with ever increasing vigilance to the affairs of Lewis. She dogged his footsteps; she spied upon him in his most secret, most innocent pleasures and boldly putting two and two together brought out a sum of enormities that was luridly sensational.

For once thoroughly roused Madam Rumor is not the lady to do things by halves.

To a few more intimately concerned, the situation was regarded as tragic, heartbreaking. But the man most nearly concerned of all gave no outward sign of distress or even of perturbation. On the contrary he affected amusement, tempered by ironic contempt.

"God! this is fame," he commented, giving his tiny moustache an airy twist. "They do me 'andsome, they do. The darlings, let 'em chirp."

To Bob he remarked at parting: "Between ourselves all this blazoning, this overweening attention becomes embarrassing. I'm a matinee idol; I am, that's what's the matter with me. It's the devil's own job to live up to a reputation like mine. I begin to pine for solitude and the pipe of peace. Pray look out a nice, quiet, clean-swept garret in the pure air of Montmartre and expect me soon. I'm aweary of the Ten Commandments."

"So," said Bob, grinning appreciatively. "I can see idolatry has set in like an epidemic—as I foretold, and of course you go about in a perpetual blush over your own celebrity. But the girl, is she to be left——?"

"No, by God," struck in Lewis with sudden vehemence. "She is not. Where I go she goes. Ruth and Boaz over again. That's settled, my son."

"Bravo! Bravissimo!" cried Bob. "And how does the Young Lochinvar propose to manage it?"

"No difficulty at all there," put in Charlie, who was ever of the company and ever practical. "He is of age; he has assumed the *toga virilis*. The law entitles him at his own will and pleasure to enter into a contract of holy matrimony. A trifling ceremony called a Scotch Marriage and the trick is done. She is his to have and to hold against all comers. A garret can be made to accommodate two, I suppose."

"To make the twain one flesh saves space," remarked Bob judicially.

"Certainly," said Charlie. "The smaller the hen-coop the closer its occupants. Very well! there follows a honeymoon among the sacred shrines and *beaux esprits* of Montmartre. Following that again the happy pair return to blazing tar-barrels, torchlight processions and the tune of 'See the Conquering Hero Comes.' Heavens! how fortune plays up to some people. It's enough to make one envious."

Lewis bowed, grimacing. "Methinks I see those bon-fires and hear the hosannas of a people drunk with adulation. Too much, too much. 'Tis sweet to be a hero and adored. Nevertheless the crowding honors grow oppressive. Uneasy lies the head that is in everybody's mouth. So prithee, as you love me, Bob, that swept and garnished garret in Montmartre."

Not that he had the least objection to publicity. Quite the contrary. To be much in men's mouths, to be accounted an *enfant terrible*, a sort of budding Byron, by pedants of respectability: to make sniffing high-nosed dames figuratively tuck in their skirts at the mere mention of his name—all that was a decided compliment, albeit of the oblique left-handed kind; and was he not, for sound economic reasons, courting notoriety? The more mischief the better adver-

tisement. He had a playful theory (founded on solid fact) that a young author (and he never forgot his literary ambition) seeking to engage public attention should as a matter of practical policy cultivate sensation with all his powers and gifts. If he could only achieve something desperately, violently outrageous—commit murder and escape hanging, figure with proper éclat in a *cause celebre* or otherwise give Mrs. Grundy her chance his fortune was made. He did his best, with meagre opportunities.

The trouble was that those who blazoned his fame had no sense of artistry in the business. They lived and moved and had their being in a state of artistic vacuity, prating much of morality and their souls. The pity was they had no souls, that he could discern. That was the difficulty. Still he did his best.

On the night of the farewell celebration for Bob, Cummy returned from her weekly prayer-meeting with her ire-tank blazing. She had listened with deep approbation to a homily on the virtue of Charity as inculcated by St. Paul. Like the Wife of Bath, though for different reasons, she thought St. Paul a sound divine, well grounded in essentials, and certain, had opportunity been afforded, to prove himself an ideal Calvinist and Covenanter. He had the stuff in him, though veiled by a wide tolerance and a desire to be all things to all men. Possibly he was too tolerant. A training in Scotch theology might have hardened his moral fibre and averted any suspicion of Laodicean laxity of toleration. Still he was a preacher very much after her own heart, and Cummy tasted a sermon as connoisseurs taste wine, delicately judging its bouquet, its flavor, strength and quality.

She came forth in a glow of spirituality, the great Pauline doctrine humming in her heart. At the door she was most graciously accosted, first by Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld and then by Mrs. Curry-Lee. With the balm of the bene-

diction still in their souls the pair were holding an impromptu meeting of their own to discuss a scandal of urgent public importance. With immense zest a select and fascinated group clustered about them to hear a character torn to shreds. Had Lewis heard what was said, and still more what was hinted or insinuated, he would certainly have felt that his scheme of self-advertisement was succeeding beyond the dreams of ambition.

Against her will Cummy was drawn into the muddy vortex of talk. Of course, remarked Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld, pointedly and sorrowfully, she must know what was said of Lewis and his ongoings. She couldn't help knowing, added Mrs. Curry-Lee, with equal point and sorrow. It was all over the town. Did his unhappy mother know how he was behaving? Did his father? And if so, how were the poor things taking their affliction? Cummy smiled in innocent, obdurate ignorance. Indeed then they must ask someone else; she was far too busy with her own affairs to bother her head about what people knew or said, or did, or felt. Exchanging glances Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld and Mrs. Curry-Lee sighed in unison. Well! well! it was all very sad, very, very sad; and they were full of heart-felt pity for the afflicted parents who were decent, Christian people. It was an awful visitation of Providence to have such a son, dear, dear, but it was. And again the grieved ladies sighed in unison.

"It's by ordinar kind o' ye, I'm sure," returned Cummy, fuming to the bursting point, though strenuously curbing her temper. "Weel! it's a mercy to be warned in time. Keep yer dochters in aboot or guid kens what may happen. It would be a sair misfortune for him, puir laddie, if he was to take a fancy and mairry ane o' them. For mercy's sake, keep them close in aboot."

And with that Parthian shot she crushed her way out, her whole substantial person surging and quivering in

rage. Tramping homeward, a flaming embodiment of fury, she indulged herself with a choice selection of curses aptly culled from the Old Testament.

"The Lord smite their lying mouths," she flared in the starry silence. "Peety frae them. Peety indeed! The peety o' tigers. Let them keep their peety. They'll need it a' for themselves some day or I'm mista'en. Stinks in their nostrils, does he? What d'ye think o' that for noses?" She snorted ferociously. "But I'm jalousin' that if a' thing was kent there'd be waur smells nearer hame. I'm prood o' him," she declared defiantly to the stars. "And I hope he'll go on till—till they're horrified out'n their skins, and that'll be a sicht."

That feat accomplished, her hero, her darling, it was to be hoped, would take a thought and mend. She would not have him endangering his soul always, only as a temporary expedient to spite unctuous, self-righteous, evil-tongued meddlers, posing as ornaments of Grace. Cummy was pious, but she was also human.

Reaching home, still a seething furnace of anger, she immediately sought out her mistress (in strict secrecy) and without preamble opened the sluices of her wrath and resentment.

"I could hae scartit their een oot," she declared, looking as if she meant what she said.

"Oh! Cummy, Cummy," protested Lewis's mother. "You forget yourself. It's not Christian to talk like that."

"Maybe no'," retorted Cummy, nothing abashed. "Nae doot it's shamfu' and me just after hearin' a sermon on charity, a good sermon too, sin-convictin' and a' that. But it's easy to forget bein' a Christian whiles when you're stung by vipers. A crunch o' the heel's the thing for them. Them sniffin' and snortin' and pretendin' this

and that and yon and the other thing. Lord! sake but it gies a body the scunner."

She made a wry face as if she were actually in the throes of a deadly nausea. "It's changed times since Jeanie Whitstane took pledges behind the coonter o' auld Tam Whitstane's pawn shop up a stinkin' close off the High Street; and Matty MacLure gaed huntin' round a' the low public houses for hers. Ye mind drunken Andra MacLure. His nose was like a danger signal on a dark night. Ay, and there was fine tales aboot baith o' them. Noo it's Mrs. Fletcher-Gauld and Mrs. Curry-Lee, by your leave. Pawn shop and public hoose a' forgot. And so religeeous, so feart o' their fine starched repute the angel Gabriel's no' good enough for them. God save us a'."

She snorted furiously, as her habit was in moments of rage.

"I dinna care that for them," she cried, snapping her fingers above her head. "No, nor Lou either I hope. D'ye ken what I was sayin' to mysel comin' along frae the prayer-meeting?"

"No Cummy."

"Ye'll be tellin' me it wasna Christian and I'm no sayin' it was. Maybe the devil got inside me. I was sayin'——"

She stopped with suspended breath at the sound of a latchkey turning in the street door.

"It's him," she broke off: "It's him, himsel."

"No," said his mother hearkening acutely to the heavy footsteps in the hall. "It's his father."

"Then for goodness sake," said Cummy in an awed whisper. "I hae telt ye naething, Mistress, not a cheep."

Lewis's mother nodded in perfect understanding.

CHAPTER XXXI

LEWIS sat limply on his spine in a tilted armchair, his feet hoisted on his writing table, a ragged cigarette in his mouth. He was not smoking it; gloomily and absent-mindedly he was chewing it. Just then he ought to be imbibing law at the feet of some tiresome Gamaliel within the precincts of the University. That over it was his duty to put in a formal appearance at the office of a firm of solicitors to whom he was apprenticed for instruction in "the practical side of his profession," that is the art of hooking clients and accumulating fees. Both engagements were cut without compunction or regret.

He was dismally low spirited. His head felt at once congested and vacuous: his temples beat with stupefying force: in the delicate region of the solar plexus there was a sensation of aching distress. Physically he was flabby, unstrung: mentally he was befogged, bemused, infinitely stupid. Nevertheless he had a torturing consciousness that it was imperatively necessary he should think clearly, coherently, about several things. The effort hurt: it also irritated, for no man likes to be baffled, least of all by himself.

"Oh! damn," he muttered petulantly. "Why the devil?" Then recovering with a grimace in which there was neither remorse nor penitence. "My son you had more than was good for you last night. Between ourselves you were drunk, blithering, slithering drunk. Well! no use whining over the purgatory of the day after. We expiate all our pleasures. Only mark this sonny, it's unwise to consume bad liquor *ad lib:* and the Frenchman's stuff is vile. Holy Bacchus what a mouth I've got—and what a head."

He clapped a hand to his fevered brow, clutching like

a hero of melodrama. In Bolem's and elsewhere seasoned topers taunted him with being a weakling. They were right. He was a weakling. Many a man with no pretensions at all could drink him blind and smile like a rosy cherub at the end of the bout. Why wasn't he constructed on lustier principles? His countrymen were noted drinkers; they carried their liquor bravely, like casks, like hogsheads, a trifle leaky at times but of noble capacity, while a little drop extra bowled him over and left him sick. Someone among his progenitors was to blame.

With grim determination he set himself to recall the events from which he was now suffering. It was desperate work, for he was groping in a dense fog. He remembered perfectly well what the main incident had been—the farewell blow-out for Bob. But the details that followed—memory held them as a sieve holds water. One thing stood clearly imprinted on his mind, that Katie was there, looking not too well pleased, he feared. Other girls were there also, a whole bevy of them, ardent, seductive creatures every one: insistently so. Stay, wasn't one of them Irish? As in a confused dream he seemed to recall the mellow Hibernian brogue, so odd, so winning in contrast to the grating, gritty Scotch which so often appeared to come from throats of brass.

And hadn't there been singing about someone who was no saint? To be sure, the man from Mullingar. Then out of the darkness light flashed; the Colleen, the gay, rollicking Colleen. But for the life of him he couldn't remember her looks, whether she was dark or fair, pretty or the reverse. For some obscure reason she had quarrelled with one of the other beauties—about him. Damnably funny. The other girl was not Katie; he was sure of that. Somehow she vanished mysteriously out of the picture. Great Heaven! suppose he had lost her. That would be too dear a price for any folly.

His spine ached and he sat up with a jerk. As he did so his eye fell on a large envelope on the table and at sight of it he scowled blackly. It was another returned manuscript. He had resolved to honor the *Saturday Review,* and in blind stupidity the *Saturday Review* declined the proffered honor—minus thanks. He wondered what tame ass waggled his long ears editorially over volunteer contributors. The little sketch, a prose poem in the manner of Baudelaire, cost him hours and hours of travail. Six times, or was it eight? it had been written, rewritten and polished till it shone and sparkled like a gem; and here it was, thrown in his face without so much as a "thank you." Well! well! no use casting pearls before swine. The swine would wallow and grunt.

His gorge rose savagely. Picking up the packet he threw it fiercely on the floor; then leaping to his feet he kicked it to the other side of the room, his teeth set, his eyes blazing. Not content with such summary vengeance he kicked it back again. The envelope burst open, and the manuscript protruded pitiably as if pleading for mercy. In a fresh access of fury he danced on it, as excited ladies in Seven Dials or the purlieus of Drury Lane dance on their hats, just to show their don't-care-a-damn spirit of independence.

His back was to the door. When he turned it was to look into the face of his mother whose quiet entrance he had not heard. Her heart stood still as she watched him, yet as their eyes met she was smiling.

"Having some exercise, dearie?" she said. "What have you converted into a football?"

He gathered up the battered packet, and with an ironically ceremonious air presented it to her.

"Another still-born child," he announced. "With the author's compliments."

She took the packet, smoothed out its torn, ragged

edges and laid it carefully, almost tenderly on the table. No need of explanations. The tale of rejected manuscripts was becoming monotonously, painfully familiar. To be sure Lewis made no fuss over his disappointments; in fact he hid them or tried to hide them from all but her. She knew how bitterly they rankled, for the eyes of love are keen and penetrating. It was on her lips now to ask if it were worth his while to slave day and night, wasting nerve and energy for nothing? But the question would imply doubt where in her heart she had faith; it might even appear to disparage. No, she would not depress: rather she must sympathize, encourage. That was a duty she owed him. So she said quietly and soothingly:

"Never you mind, my dear. The day is coming when they'll be glad enough to get contributions from you."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"A sweet prophecy, if only it would come true. No sign of fulfilment now."

"You are young," observed his mother, cheerfully, "And can afford to bide your time."

"'They also serve who only stand and wait,'" he quoted with a laugh. "Maybe. Possibly John Milton knew. But waiting is a weary, weary business, especially when you're awaiting the pleasure of fools and dullards. Then, I'm not really as young as I was; to-morrow I shall not be as young as I am to-day; the day after I may be looking for gray hairs. One may wait too long, Mumsy dear. If this sort of thing goes on you may burn your unprofitable son on a pyre of his own rejected manuscripts. They'd make quite a respectable bonfire. Could that by any chance be called going out in a blaze of glory?"

She smiled as at the quips of an incorrigible jester, though well she knew the bitter thoughts that seethed behind the seeming lightness. Not for fun does a young author court the pangs of rejection. She was dressed for

the street; but instead of leaving him she drew a chair close up to the table and sat down.

"Come and sit beside me," she said.

She took a hand of his in both her own and stroked it, half unconsciously. It is a way mothers have.

"I suppose all writers find it hard to get a start," she remarked.

"Mostly," he agreed. "Swift was forever right."

"What did he say, dear?"

"Why! that it is easy knowing a genius from the way dunces attack him. All the asses combine to bray him down. In consequence he is often in danger of dying from hunger before anyone discovers him."

"You're in no such danger," she assured him. "But the asses are trying."

"Trying," he repeated. "Something more than that, Mother. Take the case of the man who is at the head of our English literature to-day, Thomas Carlyle. He very nearly died of starvation while the stall-fed gentry grew sleek and rotund on roast beef and port. And he was in this enlightened, intellectual, catholic-minded town of ours —and fled from it lest he should perish."

"Don't be too hard on it, dearie," she pleaded, half playfully. "It has its good points. If it neglected Carlyle it was good to Scott."

"T'other way round mother, if you please," he rejoined quickly. "Scott was good to it. When Edinburgh was sinking into vacuity, inanity, nonentity he rescued it, conferred honor upon it, sent its fame ringing to the ends of the earth, so that it became a showplace for the tourists who to-day fill its coffers. And let me whisper in your ear, sweet mother, it wasna his ain folk that fand oot the genius o' Watty Scott. Strangers, Sassenachs had to do that for them. Bah! they couldn't recognize genius if they choked on it in their porridge. And what they were

they are. I suppose it's a law of nature that owls and bats must just be—owls and bats."

He laughed harshly, and she stroked his hand the more fondly.

"Of course," he pursued, gathering momentum from his own heated sense of wrong. "They're ready enough to dance when their betters pipe. Sycophants, slaves of snobbery, that's what they are, though they practise the art with ludicrous clumsiness. Outwardly they're all for gentility, respectability and the Shorter Catechism; but get in tow with some big pot, play cards or get drunk with a sprig of royalty no better than he should be, and they'd give themselves a crick in the neck trying to fawn on you. I hate them, loathe them, despise them."

His looks had all the bitterness, the concentrated raging contempt of his words. She regarded him with a deep secret shiver of dread. It would be futile to reason with him; for he would not listen. Indeed protest or argument would only incite him to greater violence. It was not often that he let himself go in this fashion with her; and the experience was therefore the more disturbing. Outwardly she was composed—she had a rare gift of smiling composure in time of trouble—but inwardly she was in a turmoil of pity, anxiety, and dismay.

"My poor Lou," she thought, her heart beating quick and hard. "My dear, poor Lou."

He might be unwise, who was wise if faults were reckoned strictly?—but he was grievously misunderstood, misrepresented.

The gust of passion transfigured him. His eye, which had been heavy and a little bloodshot, flashed like struck flint; his headache was forgotten, if it were not gone; his voice rang out with an intensity of resentment which made her quiver to the bone. For a moment she fancied he was inviting confidences, that he was giving her a chance

to talk with him seriously over many things that beat insistently in her heart. But that hope was no sooner born than it died. He was in no humor for serious or reasonable talk.

Very gently and tactfully she changed the subject, taking care to avoid the very things that were uppermost in her mind. Soon alas! it would be necessary to speak of them, probably with some plainness: things were happening which could not be concealed: but not now, not till he was in a better mood, and she had collected her thoughts and screwed up her courage. In a studiously pleasant manner she spoke of Bob and his departure, asking if the farewell function had been enjoyable.

He answered briefly, "Yes—very." He seemed disinclined to say more, and she was far to wise to press. But in sheer nervousness due to a variety of causes which had to be suppressed, she made a deplorable *faux pas,* deplorable that is to say, from her own point of view. What news, she asked, of the dark young lady who had been so kind and helpful on the night of his accident; and fled before she could be thanked? Possibly he had seen her since. Her eyes were upon him with an intentness, an eagerness to know of which she was not herself aware.

The blood rushed to his face. Oh! yes, he had seen her; and that reminded him he wished his mother to meet and know her just to discover how charming she was.

"I want you to see her here," he cried, instantly vibrating with excitement. "You'll be delighted with her, I know you will. Mother, you must see her."

"Tell me about her first," she answered quietly.

The tale he told was such as a lover tells, and it was told with the burning intensity of a heart on fire. His mother listened, without interruption, marking the look on

his face, the tones of his voice, the eagerness of his manner, all revealing more than his words.

"Upon my word, Lou," she said at last. "I believe you are in love with her, I believe you are."

He paused, as one pauses over a crisis of Fate. His head was light; his heart was pounding like a trip-hammer.

"Mother," he replied, and it seemed his whole passionate being thrilled and vibrated in his voice. "If I am not in love with her, then mortal man was never in love with woman. I adore her."

She gave a gasp: something cold and ominous seemed to clutch at her vitals: yet it was with a strange self-possessed quietness she asked:

"And—does—she—know? Does she care for you, Lewis?"

She gazed at him breathless; it seemed that all she held dear in the world hung on his answer.

"She knows and cares," he said. "It's love on both sides. And, Mother darling," he added quickly, bending and putting his face close to hers, "as you love me too, I want you to help me." All at once he seized her by both wrists. "Promise," he said, breathing very quick and hard. "Promise."

And in spite of herself she promised.

CHAPTER XXXII

TWO days later in the sunny afternoon Lewis and Katie (with calculated strategy on his part) went off together through the greenery of Queen's Park, hard by Holyrood Palace, eastward under the shoulder of Arthur's Seat, past Duddingston Loch, and thence up a wooded slope to the storied ruin of old Craigmillar Castle. It was their first meeting since the dubious encounter at the howff. That episode cost Katie some secret tears and heartaches; but on no account would she speak of it now. Later, perhaps, in the exchange of mutual confidences, her chance to ask questions might come.

Because of certain doubts, certain misgivings that troubled him Lewis watched keenly for some clue to her thoughts. Her manner was subdued. To his questioning eye she seemed uneasily quiet and pensive. Was she brooding? Was she by any possibility hurt? He wished he could remember more clearly just what had happened on the festive night. But to seek information at present would be to give himself away hopelessly, and that, the lover reflected, would be highly impolitic.

"You are gone on ancient romance," he observed when they reached the crumbling ivy-clad pile. "There it is, my love. Sup your fill."

And she did, being a genuine romantic, with a love, that was almost reverence, for the heroic past. That is the heritage of the Gael. To her the very stones breathed of the peerless Queen Mary, her loves, her joys, her tragedy. Here and here Mary trod; here and here she stood ready for the hunting in the midst of her nobles; here and here she sat on the fair summer evenings long ago, exchanging jests or love secrets with her beloved four Maries, all youthful, gay, unwitting what was so soon to be.

From yonder empty mouldering windows she looked forth with glad and quivering thoughts. The bright land of France, the boy Dauphin, her husband, Rizzio, Bothwell, Darnley, and a dour, scowling figure in black—her self-constituted father confessor in the new religion which was to her a cruel persecution; all these, Katie fancied, must have blended strangely in her vision with the sylvan scene sloping downward to Kirk o' Field and her own huddled, not very palatial palace, in the hollow under Salisbury Crags.

Katie visualized her with intense, almost painful vividness—the vivacious, eager, gay-hearted French girl, doomed by the Fates to play a tragic part in a hostile world, a world of spies, cavillers and revilers. Was she another illustration of the fatality which attends signal beauty, whether physical or moral?

"Poor Mary," sighed Katie, aloud. "Poor Mary. Isn't it pathetic?"

Tears were in her eyes. Then realizing what she was about she whisked them away, with a little shamefaced smile.

"One would think I was fey," she added.

Lewis, gazing at her silently, gave an inward start.

"Fey," he repeated. "Fey. Surely you don't believe in that absurd feeling that people call fey."

Yes, of course she believed, and the feeling wasn't absurd. How could she help believing with so much evidence to prove its truth?

He pretended to be skeptical. What was the evidence? The mumbled nonsense of some silly old Spae Wife, some hocus-pocus of superstition.

"Louis," cried Katie in a voice that somehow made his blood run chill. "Don't talk like that—please. It makes me shiver. It's as true as that we're alive this minute, that people are fey when—well! when something

dreadful is going to happen. It makes my blood run cold to think of it. Let us talk of something else."

It was in her heart to cry out. "Oh! Louis, suppose I am fey. Suppose something terrible is going to happen!"

Even in moments of supreme happiness that fear shot through her like a sudden pain, making her quiver coldly. Even now in the light and warmth, with Louis by her side, it haunted, frightened her. Happiness was so hard to get, so uncertain, so desperately hard to keep.

Lewis was studying her with curious intentness.

"Highland, Celtic through and through, my dear," he observed.

"And isn't that a pity?" she responded, with a quavering little laugh.

"A pity?" he echoed. "A pity, Katie? A pity to belong to the oldest race in Europe and the bravest, the race that has given us nearly all our poetry, our romance, our imagination, our magic and made love a sort of Holy Grail? No, no. I wish my claim to belong to it were a tenth part as clear as yours."

"Yet you see what my inheritance does."

"My dear, it is an old discovery that all qualities have their defects. We pay for our gifts and privileges, just as we pay for the bread we eat or the clothes we wear. The Fates, who are not idealists, exact their toll, with the result that my love is sensitive, super-sensitive. More, I believe she is actually psychic. She has uncanny powers of intuition, if you like, call it a touch of the second sight."

"Don't," she cried with sudden vehemence. "Don't. You frighten me. I am all goose flesh. I wouldn't have the second sight for a million worlds. It is—awful."

"Very well," he smiled. "Let us say you have Prospero's gift, or better still that you have just repeated the miracle of the Witch of Endor by bringing the dead to life. Mary's ghost has agitated you. That's a mistake."

"How is one to avoid it?" she asked, suppressing a shiver.

"I'll tell you. If you want to slip through life easily, like a well-oiled rag, pray unceasingly for a thick skin."

She laughed tremulously.

"A thick skin! Now you are making fun of me. To be thick skinned is to be stupid. You don't mean that."

"It is precisely what I do mean," he answered gravely. "A thick skin, a real rhinoceros hide is the best defence in the world against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Quite logical, believe me. What you don't feel can't bother you."

"But," she protested on a quick breath. "That would shut out all joy as well as pain."

He bowed assent. "You have hit it. And the joy is worth all the pain; the joy I have in the love of a lovely girl," he added, his glowing eyes on hers.

She crimsoned in rapture; yet trembled as in fear.

"Oh! as I have said before, love can be the most painful thing on earth," she said in a low voice.

"Not ours," he returned ardently. "Not ours if we can help it, my Katie. And we're going to help it. By all the powers of love we are."

Then after a pause. "How sweet the summer's honey breath is. Come, let us enjoy the sunshine and be happy."

They sat down with their backs to a sun-warmed wall. Rolling and lighting the eternal cigarette, Lewis waved an arm comprehensively at the sun-flooded landscape.

"In the bard of Rydal's words Earth has not anything to show more fair," he remarked, half jestingly, half in the ardor of admiration. "The rich bestudded plain of East Lothian. Corn, turnips, and kine, my dear. Only it wasn't of fat kye Mr. Wordsworth was thinking. It was Westminster Bridge at sunrise he had in his eye, which shows that poets aren't a practical folk. A sensible

man would be thinking of breakfast, of ham and eggs, and the things that make a fellow sleek."

With a soft laugh she nudged close to him: turning sideways he patted her cheek.

"My love, my life," he murmured. "My own. Katie."

It seemed his whole soul was in the simple words. She thrilled to her inmost fibre, thrilled with such exquisite bliss that a sudden mist filled her eyes. Yet even in that ineffable moment with her cup of happiness overflowing and the summer warmth like a cordial in her veins, she shivered as at the touch of something darkly menacing and deadly cold. She felt as if she were holding on to Louis against some unseen evil power that was trying to drag them apart. Was she indeed fey?

With a sensation for which she had no name she glanced at her lover's face. "He is very happy," she thought. "Very, very happy. Dearest Louis. I must not allow ridiculous notions to get into my head."

He sat unwontedly still, the cigarette held loosely between his lips, his eyes roaming over the wide prospect, east and south to the German Ocean and the Pentlands, as if taking in its every feature. The familiar scene had been part of his life since infancy. But to-day—perhaps through the subtle influence of Katie, it was endued with a new, strange sentiment, vague but disquieting. A shadow lay across the brightness. Was it a shadow of foreboding and farewell. For secretly he too was besieged by black thoughts. But immediately he remembered his own rule. Does fortune frown or show malice? Then smile defiantly in the jade's face. That was the only way.

All at once he turned to Katie. "Happy, sweetheart?" he asked.

"Dearest, I couldn't be happier—I think."

"A bit of paradise, my sweet. Well! do you know that I haven't had a kiss to-day."

The omission was promptly made good.

"By the way, are we engaged?" he asked, as if the idea had just occurred to him.

"I don't know. You silly boy, what a question." She was laughing lightly: but in truth she was almost choking with excitement.

"Best to know how one stands," he returned, his looks a caress. "You see I don't want any slip between the cup and the lip. We really and truly belong to each other, don't we?"

"Dearest, I am yours—you know that."

He looked into her eyes as if to read the inmost thoughts of her heart:

"You know what that means. If witnesses were present we should be husband and wife. A Scotch marriage. How would you like that?"

"God is our witness that we love each other, Louis."

"Ah!" he observed with a doubtful intonation. "In case proof were needed it would be rather hard to subpœna Him, I'm afraid. Besides I'm not at all sure how He'd be received in our law courts. Think of a punch-drinking, fiery-nosed Scotch judge glowering over his spectacles at the Deity: a perky Advocate with his 'Remember, sir, you are on your oath,' and a jury of hell-fire Calvinists sniffing for lapses in doctrine."

"Louis," cried Katie, in a spasm of dread. "Don't be blasphemous. Don't, dear."

"I'm not. I'm all reverence. I'm only visualizing what might and probably would happen—if jurisdiction availed."

"What a blessing it is that God is wiser and more merciful than men," said Katie simply.

"An unspeakable blessing," agreed Lewis promptly. "But, my darling you are trembling. Forgive me. This is queer talk for lovers."

"I like it Louis. I just love to talk with you about things. You treat me like a rational being."

"As if you had a soul," he smiled.

He looked with almost devouring tenderness into her face, recalling what he once read, that woman restores to man the God he is in danger of losing. Surely, surely it was so. Her sweet kiss, her ardent trusting look, taught more, gave more comfort than all the philosophy of the sages. His poet's sensibility craved woman's love and sympathy as the flower craves life and warmth. And he had both without stint, without measure. What a relief, what a joy it was after snobbery and malice had done their worst, to look into her eyes, hear the tones of her voice, feel her soft clasp. It made amends for everything.

"Queer talk," he repeated. "Well here's a secret for you. Some day long hence you may think of it. I never talked like this to any girl before, because I never found it worth while. Take that as a compliment or not as you please."

"Oh! Louis," she responded, unspeakable delight shining in her face. "You make me very, very proud. But dearest, do I deserve it?"

"As truly as the rose deserves to be called lovely," he answered. "Now I'll tell you something more; don't think it fantastic. In the beginning when God cast the horoscope of the young world He saw far, far in the future two lovers by old Craigmillar Castle and said: 'Those two for each other': and here we are, each for each," and bending, so that his breath was warm upon her cheek he recited in a low voice:

"When my Katie I beheld
My full heart with music swelled:
When my Katie smiled on me,
Heavenly glory did I see.
Katie's heart is now my own.
Crowned, I sit upon a throne.

There, my sweet, you have it."

For a full half minute she sat mute and motionless,

unresponsive, seemingly frozen. Then of a sudden her lip quivered, and as if self-control were gone she burst into a paroxysm of sobbing. Startled and bewildered by this unexpected manifestation of feminine nature Lewis took her in his arms, comforting her as if she were a hurt child. With a choking inarticulate cry she put up both arms and clasped him frantically round the neck. What her emotions were she could not have told. Joy and pride thrilled through her: a dizzying bliss throbbed in her heart. It seemed she had all that made life worth living. But alas! deep down, underlying the pulsing happiness, was something else that clutched at her very vitals—a cold foreboding, a poisonous terror which shook her as with an ague.

Still bewildered but tenderly protective, Lewis strained her to him, so that he felt the quick heaving of her breast against his own. She lay thus, panting like a wounded dove, he murmuring over her in a maze of love, pity, and perplexity. Then all at once she drew off, dabbing her eyes half viciously as if they were the culprits.

"You must think me very silly," she said, "to behave like this."

She could not explain that foreboding, that hidden terror. He had spoken enviously of her Celtic intuition. She dared not tell him what spectres it had raised in her path and his. She could only hope and pray, and Heaven knew how fervently she did both, that her vision was false, that her frightened imagination was not in very truth making her fey.

CHAPTER XXXIII

LEWIS would have dismissed the feeling with a gay or even a scoffing laugh. Fey! what did it mean to be fey? What but truckling to fate, surrendering courage, going about in a fatalistic trance of fear and imbecility? No such old wives' superstition for him. He would follow his star, not timorously like a coward who spied a spectre in every bush, but like a warrior marching bravely to victory. In the fight with destiny a high heart is the best of weapons.

Looking at Katie, with menacing perils in mind, he told himself that were the whole world, plus a legion of devils, arrayed against him, he would never surrender, never dip the flag, never while a gasp of breath was left to him.

But Katie shrank from the ordeal she saw ahead. The idea of meeting his mother being especially terrifying.

"Do you love me or do you not?" Lewis demanded impatiently.

"Louis, that is unkind," she answered, her face telling how the question hurt.

"Then it's settled. To-morrow afternoon, and, sweetheart, remember what depends upon it."

At the appointed time, therefore, Katie, a trembling, palpitating figure, entered the drawing-room of Lewis's mother. It was a spacious room, furnished in solid, dignified mid-Victorian style. You would have said that the world went very comfortably with its mistress. It breathed comfort, security, peace! suggested a haven of quiet, apart from the storms and tumults of the world. But Katie noticed none of these things. For aught she could tell it might have been a hovel or a castle. In her

agitation she had eyes or thought for nothing but the woman who received her so graciously and who meant so much, so very much that could not be put into words.

The introduction over, his mother, remarking they wanted to have a quiet talk, sent Lewis off to his own room. As he went Katie trembled as with a sense of desertion: but he smiled at her reassuringly.

"Half an hour," he smiled. "I'll give you half an hour to confab. Not a minute more."

He remembered with satisfaction that his father was absent, having been called to a business consultation in the country. A good omen, thought Lewis, decidedly a good omen.

It was a day of brilliant sunshine. Perhaps it was by accident Katie was placed so that the light fell full on her face. In her excitement she was not aware of the advantage this gave an observer. All her attention was for her hostess, who sat near but a little more in the shade. Katie thought she had never seen so lovely or so gracious a lady. And Lewis was like her—the same oval face, the same cast of features, the same eyes, the same coloring, and, making allowance for difference of sex, the same voice and the same ingratiating smile. Instinctively she felt safe, and was soon breathing freely.

"My dear," said Lewis's mother, coming directly to the point. "I have heard a great deal about you. I suppose Lewis has told you that you are very pretty." And as Katie flushed. "Of course he has. Forgive me for being personal; but this is a personal talk, isn't it? He tells me you are Highland."

"Yes."

"And your father and mother, are they both alive?"

"No," answered Katie, "they are both dead."

"Oh! my dear, how sad." The words came with a

sigh of sympathy. "But I daresay you have brothers and sisters."

"No," said Katie trying hard to maintain her composure, "I have neither brother nor sister."

"Dear, dear: but you must be very lonely. But of course you have near relatives?"

"Yes, uncles and aunts and cousins, only I don't see much of them."

"Then you are alone in the world?"

"Yes, quite alone."

An expression of tender pity came into the elder woman's face.

"It is a very trying position for a young girl," she said reflectively. "May I ask what you are doing in Edinburgh?"

Katie faltered, flushing as if her face were suddenly on fire.

"I am trying to sing," she said, with a doubtful little smile.

"Oh! Do you mean professionally?"

There was astonishment in the tone: Katie could only pray there was no suspicion.

"Yes." She shuddered, holding her breath for the next question, as the criminal in the dock holds his breath for the verdict of the jury.

"That's interesting. You are just beginning, I suppose? A successful singer may have a great career, though I am told the life is a hard one. Of course you like it?"

Wondering just how much the other knew Katie replied that she had always been fond of singing.

"An inborn gift," smiled Lewis's mother. "Well! my dear, from all I hear singing is not the only thing you are fond of. Lewis comes into the reckoning, doesn't he?"

She was watching Katie narrowly, as if to read her very soul.

"I adore him." The words came shyly, yet with an undertone of vehemence that was thrilling.

His mother smiled half wistfully.

"Then, my dear, so far as I can make out it's a case of mutual adoration, though I am not going to tell you all he says." She was thinking hard, her gaze still fixed on the girl's face. "Well! suppose I give you my boy, entrust him to you, you understand, would you be good to him, would you always take care of him? He needs care."

"I would die for him," replied Katie on a heaving pant. Her head was light: she could hear the beating of her own heart above the steady tick-tock, tick-tock of the gilded clock on the mantelpiece.

"Yes, my dear, that's how a woman feels about the man she loves. We're made that way. Only I'd rather have you live for him than die for him. And I rather think that would be his own wish." She smiled very sweetly. "But many, very many things have to be thought of. Has he told you what his ambition is, that he wants to be a writer?"

"Yes, he has told me."

"As I thought. Have you considered what that means? It's slow uncertain work making a reputation, and in the end he may fail."

"I am sure he won't fail," Katie returned, with unconscious ardor. "He is very clever. I know no one like him."

"There we agree. Still you know what the good Book says, that the race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong. You must think, we all must think of these things, my dear."

As if suddenly remembering it she switched off to the night of the accident and the glimpse she then got of Katie.

"I had no chance to thank you properly," she said,

a sincere gratitude in voice and face. "Lewis has told me all about it, and how prompt you were and how skilful. He says a doctor couldn't have done better, and is sure you saved his life, or at any rate averted a very serious illness. Have you had any experience in that way?"

All at once Katie's eyes were dazzled as by flying sparks. That question, that dreaded question why did it come now? With a mental wrench she composed herself.

"Yes," she answered with a firmness that amazed herself. "A slight experience. I—was a nurse for a little while."

"A nurse! You mean a medical nurse?"

"Yes."

"Ah! that accounts for it. Well! it was lucky."

Katie breathed again, feeling as one feels in skating over crackling ice with the knowledge of deep, black water below. Fortunately Lewis's mother was too intent on her own thoughts to pursue the subject. Again she thanked Katie, ending briskly with the remark, "Now we must have some tea. And I think Lewis may be allowed to share our four o'clock. He will be on needles and pins, poor boy."

He was. As he entered, his whole being vibrating with doubt and expectancy he cast a keen anxious glance from one to the other, as if to read his fate in their faces. What had happened? Had they taken to each other as he hoped and believed they would, or—. They smiled at him, instantly dispelling uncertainty, and his heart gave a bounding leap that made him giddy.

"Well!" he inquired with a desperate effort to be calm and casual. "How has the crack gone?"

"How, but as it should?" replied his mother, pouring out the tea which had been set at her elbow. "Now, you make yourself useful, please."

He saw Katie off, tingling, burning with impatience to have her account of the interview.

"It's been delightful, Louis," she told him. "Your mother is the most charming and kindly woman I ever met."

"Which means," cried Lewis jubilantly, "that you have hit it off together." His pulses were dancing: he felt as if he must shout his exultation to the scandal of the street.

In his gleeful absorption he did not see a face at a window close by, that first set in a start of amazement and then spread in a broad evil grin.

"Oh-ho," said its owner to himself. "So that's the way of it. And in broad daylight, too. We're getting on, we're getting on. I wonder what some folk with unco proud noses will have to say to that?"

He recognized Katie as the girl he once saw in Bolem's tavern and later several times at the Frenchman's howff, whither he sometimes went on the sly for secret pleasure. Slipping to the door he peered after them and returned slapping his leg.

"Ho, ho," he repeated in a husky, alcoholic gurgle, and again, "Ho, ho. This is letting the fat into the fire, I'm thinkin'."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THREE glorious, never-to-be-forgotten hours they spent together, while Lewis in a glow of creative imagination pictured their future. Katie shivered deliciously as she listened. It seemed too incredibly good to be true; it must be a fantastic dream from which the wild exultant dreamer by her side would presently awake with a shock of disappointment. And yet—why should it not be true? Why? The good God in His loving kindness meant His creatures to be happy. Surely, surely He did. She looked at Lewis: his eyes shone: his face was radiant; every tone of his voice was an incentive to confidence. So under the spell of love and love's eloquence she yielded herself to the enchantment of that fascinating, magical future.

It was late when they parted, after tea in a quiet suburban tearoom where they could talk, where in fact Lewis could continue his weaving of the bright patterns of their destiny. Both were a little light-headed, both lifted into aerial regions far, far above drab realities. Eden with all its pristine glories was in their hearts: spring, exuberant in sun and sap, was in their blood: a nameless feeling, like the breathing of the airs of paradise, filled their whole being. Little wonder they were intoxicated.

That evening Katie was to sing at the howff. That too would soon be changed: so much was to be changed. Lewis begged leave to accompany her; it might be the last time, he pleaded, that he could hear her there. But she was firm in refusal. Let him have patience a wee, wee bit longer. Besides she was sure to do badly; indeed she could not imagine how she was to get through her part with all her thoughts elsewhere. Lewis was too happy, too wildly elated to press his request.

"As you wish," he agreed without argument. "To-morrow then, sweetheart, and I expect to have great news for you."

"To-morrow, dearest." And she held up her face in the summer dusk.

On leaving her Lewis did not turn homeward. In his wildly exalted condition it would be absurd, he reasoned, to go soberly indoors as if the world swung on its axis just as usual. He could fly, run, leap, dance, shout, sing; what he could not do was to sit sedately in an atmosphere of demure, or worse, of glum domesticity. Besides—and here was the most cogent reason for delaying his return—to a certainty his mother would prefer to have him out of the way while she was getting in the thin end of the wedge. It was a delicate operation, requiring tact, finesse, and complete freedom from interruption. No, he would not jeopardize success by going in just yet. By the time he got back the train would be laid.

He called on Charlie, found him absent, and left a hastily scrawled note:

> Bound for Bolem's. Things is a-marchin', old son. But I ain't hexited or hintoxicated, oh! no, not me. Just kind of scrumptitious. Kings may be blessed but yours trooly is glorious. Come and see.

From behind the bar Tobias Bolem received him with the right hand of fellowship and a grin of geniality from ear to ear. The devoted spirits in the room behind vociferated a royal welcome. A dozen men sprang up to grasp his hand: a dozen more smote him jovially on the back. The very sight of Velvet Coat was a challenge to merriment. Someone struck up "Slap bang here we are again, jolly dogs are we." Eager questions followed. Where had he been, what had he been up to since his last heroic performance in Bolem's?

"Lasses," gurgled an ancient toper. "Just the lasses, I'm jalousin'."

"Ah! the lasses," chimed in another ruby-nosed ancient. "They're a sair temptation when the blood's young and hot. Aweel, sit ye doon, my mannie, and stick in. The lasses was never in't wi' good liquor. 'Leese me on drink,' as Bobbie says. Here's t'ye."

A group of girls shrilled in protest. Never, never would they associate Velvet Coat with such an abominably ungallant sentiment. Drink, indeed! Pooh! And chattering thus they clustered about Lewis with cooing words and endearing names. He did like them, didn't he?

"Like you, my charmers?" he replied, with the air of a Sultan distributing his favors. "Why! every wise man's son knows you are nature's own darlings. The world would be dull, void, and desolate without you."

"Just the finished article," quoth one, taking off her glass. She was the amazon who, finding Lewis no great game financially, experimented in jokes at his expense.

"Young folks get daft notions in their heads whiles," observed the champion of liquor sagely. "Wait a bit till yer aulder: then ye'll see."

"The voice o' experience," chuckled one who had the license of a crony. "Yer at yer third wife, are ye no, Wullum?"

"Maun come awfae expensive in head-stanes," remarked a pessimist sourly. "Waste o' good money, I'd call it."

"Weel, weel," said the crony observing a frown on Wullum's face. "Let that flee stick to the wa'. If a man wants to go on mairryin' it's his ain look out. He's the ane that pays the piper."

"I have heard," put in yet another, "there's sic a thing as mairryin' siller. I kent a man who had fower

wives and did well out o' the business—after a' expense o' head-stanes."

"Faix and it's thinkin' I am this is more like a wake than a weddin'," interjected the mellifluous voice of the Colleen. "Let the dead be, rest their souls. Every man to his taste, as the priest said when he kissed the fiddler's wife."

"Hear, hear," rose in a chorus of approving laughter. "Every man to his taste. That's the doctrine."

The girl had moved close up to Lewis, a look in her eyes which puzzled him.

"Well! how goes it with the Colleen Bawn?" he asked, by way of breaking the ice.

"How goes it? Och! my dear, 'tis lent all the year round in this blessed Garden of Aiden. So, mavrone, I'm for the green island where the air is sweet and the girls sing and the bhoys are the bhoys, may the blessed sints in glory presarve them."

"Shame," laughed Lewis reproachfully. "Turning your back in that disdainful way on poor old Scotland."

"'Tis a frosty, foggy place," she returned. "And the people are that cold and thrifty! Ach don't be speakin' av it."

"Thrifty even in lovemaking?" inquired Lewis, with a grin of deep meaning.

The Colleen's eyes twinkled as she replied.

"Did ye ever hear tell of Phil Docherty's ould mare? She was a good mare and did her best to be proper and useful and all that: but nobody loved her. So one fine mornin' the poor baste just lay down and died. 'Twas a judgment on them that treated her so badly."

They were interrupted by a great shout, a shout of welcome that made the rafters ring. Charlie had entered with Tobias at his heels, and each was as welcome as the other. After a fresh round several of the girls rose to go,

the Colleen among them. Interested, he scarcely knew why, Lewis promptly rose to escort her to the street. In the close outside the swing door she halted, letting her companions go on ahead.

"Are you really going away, Colleen Bawn?" Lewis asked.

"Going away," she replied, "for ever and ever and that's a long, long time they say. And I'm glad I saw you, for I have this to say. Be good to the girl I needn't name. She's a darlint, an angel if ever one breathed on this wicked earth."

"A parting kiss on that," said Lewis, surprised and excited, and made as if to seize her. She slipped quickly back, her finger raised in protest.

"No, no," she said decisively. "It wouldn't be playing the game."

"But you've paid her a great compliment," said Lewis, taken aback. "For that reason she wouldn't mind."

"She would mind. I would mind in her place. Any true and proper girl would mind. Now you be a good bhoy. She deserves it. And she worships you. Oh! by the sints in glory but she does. She'd say mass on her bare knees twenty times a day just—just to see you smile."

Lewis was perplexed, flattered, and a litle piqued at being held off.

"How do you come to know all this?" he asked.

"Och! maybe I haven't eyes in my head," was the quick reply. Then as quickly lest he should misunderstand. "Don't you be thinkin' she takes on or goes round wid the likes av me. She doesn't. But it fell out we met where we could talk by ourselves. And I know a girl's heart. She says you're a genius and that some day you'll be a great man. Likely it's true."

"Good Lord!" cried Lewis more and more puzzled,

though by no means displeased. Coming a little closer as if to avoid being overheard she went on:

"Listen my dear. Once I knew a man and they said he was a genius. You make me think of him; only he wasn't very wise, poor bhoy, and now——"

She stopped as if checking herself: but went on again: "If he wasn't under the green sods, it's not talkin' to you I'd be this night in an ould hell like this. He wrote the most beautiful things for the papers, people said how clever they were, a lot of poetry too, about me. I have it all yet, and times and times I read it to myself, though I know every word by heart. And then, my dear, I think and think till I'm like to go mad and do wild wicked things just to stop thinkin'. Have you ever been like that?"

"Often," said Lewis. "Go on."

"Well! the thought of him sent me away and the thought of him's takin me back again, and that's the silliness of a girl, Mary mother av God help her. But where was I? Oh! yes. For your own sake and her sake, and maybe a little bit my sake be good to her. She's true, my dear, she's true."

From the close-head came an impatient call. "Are you going to spend the night there gabblin?"

"Coming, coming," answered the Colleen. Then to Lewis, "She's taught me a lesson: but I couldn't begin to tell you. And isn't it queer to think I'll never see her or you any more, never any more, as long as water runs and the hills and green valleys last. But I'll think of you both. Good-by, my dear."

She held out her hand which trembled a little: Lewis bent over it as if it were the hand of a princess. Next moment she was off at a run, and he heard a trill of broken laughter as she joined her companions.

He returned to the convivial company within feeling grave and a trifle eerie. But the atmosphere was not one

either for gravity or eeriness. That night Bolem was entertaining some of his most prized patrons, young bloods about town some of them, with whom Lewis had spent many a merry hour, and he had no option but to yield himself to the festive spirit of the occasion. There were sly suggestions of other delights elsewhere, but he resolutely shook his head. The refusal, however, compelled him to be more ardent over present joys. Therefore he let himself go. Never had he been more brilliant, more amusing, more riotously gay. He laughed, he jested, he set the room in a roar, and kept it chuckling and gurgling. Some quiet, keen observers thought his gayety a trifle hysterical. Had Katie seen and heard him she would have decided, with a shudder, that he was fey: dancing on the brink of a precipice, blind to the peril of the performance.

And presently with Charlie and a few chosen blades he paid convivial visits to some of Bolem's rivals, everywhere liberally sampling their wares. This continued with ever increasing zest till a public clock struck twelve.

"We've got a poet," someone cried. "Velvet Coat, let's have a stave about the midnight chimes. There, tune up." And primed and gloriously afflated Lewis broke into an improvised chant.

"Listen to the midnight bell,
Chiming down the empty street.
What a story it could tell;
But it won't, it's too discreet.

It just laughs with you and me,
Says 'Although I know full well
That you've been upon the spree,
Yet I'm such a wise old bell,

I won't give the show away.
No tales out of school I tell;
Run away, boys, run and play.'
That's the ticket, gay old bell."

A shout of admiration went up: followed by, "Another drink on the head of that, by gosh."

"It's makin' for hame I'd be, if I was you," a gruff, strong voice remarked, as a bull's-eye light flashed upon them.

"Hullo, old Cockleorum," hiccoughed the reveller who had spoken before. "How's your bloomin' helmet? Let's try it on."

"Shut up," came tart and quick from another of the party, scenting danger. Then to the policeman. "Quite r-right, shir. Time everybody wash in bed. Shake hands."

He did: and following his example one by one each member of the party solemnly shook the astonished law by the hand.

Reaching home with devious steps Lewis paused a moment on the pavement and surveyed the house. It was dark and still. Excellent. "Everybody in bed," he told himself. Mounting the steps he slipped his key into the latch, turned it cautiously and entered. To his surprise his mother was waiting for him. Though frowning inwardly he greeted her with an assumption of gladness. She did not seem to hear.

"Oh! Lou," she said in a smothered voice that somehow struck a chill to his heart, sobering him instantly. "Oh! my dear, my dear, I thought you were never coming."

She was trembling: her face was ghastly white and he could see all too plainly she had been weeping. He gazed at her speechlessly. No need to ask what had happened. As clearly as if she uttered it the dread word "Catastrophe" sounded like doom in his ears.

CHAPTER XXXV

LEWIS judged aright. That evening while he was rearing cloud castles among the stars and celebrating his own ineffable triumphs, Fate intervened with one of her oblique, satiric strokes. Her instrument was Andy Gibb, the man who looked from his window and slapped his leg with a malicious "Ho, ho!" at sight of the passing lovers. On some question of private morals Andy had once been rebuked by Lewis's father, and the affront left him with a grudge which he swore to feed fat some day. The day had come.

"So you're for havin' a weddin' at your house," he leered, meeting his old critic in the street.

"Oh?" said Lewis's father, pulling up and wincing almost as if the announcement were a blow.

"Hae ye no' heard, d'ye no ken?" inquired Andy in mocking surprise. "Losh! it's the talk o' the toon. Hee, hee."

And without more ado he told what he thought appropriate and telling of the hectic tale.

"A black, damnable lie," was the angry retort.

"Hee, hee," tittered Andy. "Weel! I'm just tellin' ye for auld sake's sake. Ye maun be prood o' yer son. God, he'll hae yer name ringin' doon the street; he has it already. Yer a very religious man," pursued Andy, avidly savoring the sweets of revenge. "But wouldn't it be weel to let religion begin at hame? Ye should keep the laddie in aboot: no so much in the public hoose. I meet him there whiles, for I've never been abune a dram and a bit jollification. Ye should see him. He's a great favor-

ite, and that clever, just as good as a London clown when he gets goin'. It was in Bolem's public hoose he met her. I was there and seen it."

"Met whom?" The question came like a thunder clap.

"His intended. The lass he's for mairryin'. Hee, hee. She's no' bad lookin' and has mair sweethearts than she can manage, I'm telt. But Lewis is stickin' in and cuttin' them a' oot. He's a braw wooer. If ye like to come along to Frenchy's place be the Calton Hill ye'll see her. She's sure to be there."

Lewis's father stayed for no more. He might have dismissed Andy's tale as the vindictiveness of an evil-tongued babbler, if it stood alone. But alas! it did not stand alone. It was but the copestone to other horrible tales. In a boiling tumult he began to piece together tale upon tale, incident upon incident. For that purpose he took an hour's walk by himself, stealing off where he was least likely to meet anyone he knew. It was bitter, maddening fare to digest.

The evening was soft and warm, the sky serene: mountains and crags of white cloud rose above, like rose-tinted ramparts of Heaven, breathing a benign peace. But for him there was no peace. His mind was a raging furnace, a whirlwind of fierce emotions. A man multiplying wrongs succeeds to his own bitter cost. From his walk he returned a throbbing mixture of misery and rage, and the misery was greater than the rage.

In that mood he reached home, and strode in on his startled wife.

"My dear," she cried, at sight of his face. "Oh! my dear, you look ill. Has anything happened?"

He flung himself into a chair, breathing hard, and looked up at her with lurid, bloodshot eyes.

"Yes, something has happened. You and I have been nursing a viper in our bosoms, and it has stung me to the heart, to the heart," he repeated hoarsely.

There was no need to ask the name, yet the quavering question came.

"Lewis?"

"Yes, Lewis."

A ghastly silence fell. For one black moment she seemed to be turned to stone. Thought and sensation were suspended as though her world were suddenly blown to splinters and she stood paralyzed amid the wreck. Then a vague desolate sound filled her ears, a hollow moaning, as of ocean breaking sullenly in some vast black abyss under her feet.

His voice recalled her, with the impression that he had been talking for a long time. He was rehearsing Andy's harrowing tale.

"Have you heard anything of—of this person he has taken up with?" he demanded suddenly.

There was suspicion in his tone; he was beginning to suspect the whole world. Half a second she hesitated, with a flashing realization of what her answer might mean.

"Yes," she replied dazedly. "She—she came to see me this afternoon. Lewis brought her."

He stared as one who hears something utterly, preposterously incredible in its blackness and treachery.

"She—came—to—see—you. Lewis—brought—her?"

"Yes."

It seemed she could say no more: but plucking courage from desperation she went on:

"And don't be angry, dear. I thought her a nice, charming sensible girl."

He could have laughed at the horrible satire.

"Nice, charming, sensible," he exploded, sitting up. "Good God! have you any idea what you're saying? She's—she's——" And he used an epithet which made her reel.

"He dared to bring her here to—to pollute my house. And you received her, made her welcome, I suppose. What next? Did he, did she tell you he means to marry her?"

"He told me he is very fond of her, and——"

"Fond, fond," he interrupted, leaping to his feet. Then breaking off as if afraid to trust himself, he strode round the room, trying to choke down his fury.

"Is he in the house?" he demanded, coming to a halt. "Get him here at once. This has to be settled now, at once, this very minute."

"He is not in." She was quaking, but kept her self-control marvellously.

"Not in. Off with his blackguards and harlots, off disgracing the name he bears. Very well! then he'll never set foot inside my door again. Let him go to his public-house drabs and see how he'll fare. Never again will he enter my house, never while I'm master of it."

Again she had the unsteady feeling of one about to faint, and again pulled herself together.

"But, dearest, think, where will he go? He has no other place."

"He should have thought of that in time. As he has made his bed let him lie on it. I tell you I am done with him. From this time he is no son of mine."

She laid a hand imploringly on his arm.

"Don't, don't decide hastily. You'd be sorry if you did. Speak to him: give him a chance. He'll do as you wish. I am sure he will."

He laughed a hoarse, broken laugh.

"Do as I wish! That would be something new for him. When did he ever do as I wished? Do as I wish! It was always his own way with him. Now he can take it. He thwarts me in everything just to show how little he cares for what I say. I could stand that. I have stood it. Oh! many and many's the red face I have had because of him. But this—I'm done with him. I can endure no more."

Suddenly the burst of passion spent itself, leaving as it seemed, a palsied old man. Collapsing into his chair with a suppressed moan he buried his face in his hands. She put her arms about him in a frantic embrace, comforting him as if he were a stricken child.

"I feel as if something had snapped in my head," he told her pathetically. "This night's work will do for me."

Presently she got him coaxed upstairs and saw him tucked like the ghost of himself, into bed. Then returning below she sat down in the silent house to await the coming of Lewis.

And Lewis tarried. Once a footstep sounded on the pavement outside and she jumped up, thinking it was his. But it passed on, leaving a deepened silence. The stillness became awesome, eerie. The doors, the furniture, the stairs creaked as if at the touch of some unseen visitant. She felt very cold, with a strange, shuddering sensation at the roots of her hair.

When at last Lewis came, excited and too palpably festive, she felt it would be impossible to tell him what had happened in his absence. She would wait. To-morrow both he and she would be in a serener, fitter mood. Now that he was with her, she was not angry: rather she was full of an infinite pity as over a child that wantonly hurts itself. How could he be so foolish, so tragically unwise

for himself? How could he? But of this she was sure, that the worse his trouble the more he needed her.

She got him off to bed, cautioning him to go softly lest he should disturb his father. He would have questioned her, spoken of Katie and her visit, but with a look and a gesture she indicated it was not the time for speech.

"You look tired," she told him. "Late hours don't agree with you. There go and get a good sleep." And she kissed him with even more than her usual tenderness

For at least ten minutes after getting into bed he wondered what new development had disturbed the domestic atmosphere. Another kick-up, he supposed. He supposed also that he was himself the innocent, unwitting cause. He generally was. Heigh ho! Would there never come a time when one could have a little pleasure without raising a storm? Still no use worrying. Besides he was very, very drowsy after the night's proceedings. Sleep, sweet, deep, oblivious sleep was his present need: and he slept the heavy sleep of the drugged brain.

Next morning he was late for breakfast. His father had already gone out: his mother was mysteriously occupied with household affairs: Cummy, scouting round, peeped in with a quick, inquiring look, and was hurriedly withdrawing when he called her back. She was enveloped in a huge apron, and her expression was grim.

"Well," he said in his brightest manner, coming promptly to the matter uppermost in his mind. "You know who was here yesterday, Cummy, I suppose. Did you see her?"

Making sure that the door was shut Cummy moved nearer.

"No," she answered. "I saw naebody: but I heard o' a visitor. Ye'll no' hae sen yer father since?"

"No," said Lewis.

"Weel," said Cummy, her expression becoming yet grimmer. "I'd be keepin' oot o' his way for a while, if I was you."

He affected to be amused. "Why, my good Cummy?"

"Because, by my way o' thinkin' it's best to let angry dogs be. It's poor fun makin' bad worse. I say nae mair."

She turned away quickly, casting a glance over her shoulder, in which he read both warning and rebuke, and was gone.

Slowly, thoughtfully he helped himself to toast and marmalade. Appetite was poor: but one must eat. It was a convention like washing and dressing and trying to appear respectable. By a little mental arithmetic he put this and that together and decided there had been "another holy row." He was in no mood for rows: he did not desire them: but if they were forced upon him——.

Presently he went slowly upstairs to his workroom. There was much work to be done, a sprightly, delectable essay on "The True Art of Pleasure" to be polished off, and, yes, a mass of doughy law stuff to be digested. Taking up a law book he flung it viciously into a corner.

Damn the law and all its concerns. Millions and millions of people lived and loved and were happy without any knowledge of law.

He took up the essay on "Pleasure": but alas! the spirit of sprightliness would not come. "A cripple showing people how to run," he thought. "A pretty satire."

The essay must abide the revival of wit—should that ever come. What he felt inclined to write was a devasting tragedy, showing up the eternal, unspeakable, unfathomable stupidity, malice and boredom of things, with himself as the suffering hero—a more rebellious, more biting, cutting, cynical Hamlet.

Lighting a cigarette he sat down limply to consider the situation. Almost in the same moment his mother entered. She was very pale with an anxious, troubled look and a manner that struck him as a clear portent of calamity. He set a chair for her, mentally bracing himself.

"You are white-faced, mother," he said, wisely resolved to take the initiative. "Is there anything vexing you? There hasn't been another storm, has there?"

Her lips twitched ever so slightly.

"Yes, I am afraid you may call it that."

He drew in his breath, with a kind of gulp.

"Over Katie?"

She nodded sadly. "Tongues have been busy making mischief."

He sprang up, his face suffused with passion. There was no languor now, no drooping of spirits.

"Oh! this cursed place!" he cried. "May their vile tongues wither at the root. I suppose they have been pouring poison into my father's ears. Cummy has just been warning me to keep out of his way. Is it serious?" he asked looking down on her.

"I am afraid, dearie, it is serious."

She spoke quietly, but he could see the effort she was making to hide her distress and alarm. She did not tell him that it needed all her arts of persuasion and appeal to get his father to go out that morning, without, as he said, settling accounts.

"Who are the scandal-mongers?" Lewis demanded. "What have they been saying?"

She looked up at him, her eyes pools of trouble.

"A good many unpleasant things, Lewis," she answered slowly. Then after a pause. "Are you quite sure, dear, that she—that she is a good girl?"

"Good God!" he ejaculated, like one startled out of

all reason. "If she's not, then there's not a good girl living to-day. You have seen her for yourself."

"One can't tell just by seeing people what they are," she replied.

Something in her tone struck a chill to his heart. A second he looked at her, with piercing eyes: then with a wild clutch he caught her hands in so fierce a grip that she almost called out.

"Mother!" he cried, his voice hoarse with sudden terror and excitement. "You're—you're not going to fail me? You're not turning against me, are you?"

She rose, gently freeing her hands.

"I can never be against you, my darling," she answered, choking on the words.

"I know, I know," he owned. "I shouldn't have asked such a question. But what's wrong? Tell me."

She caught the lapels of his jacket with both hands, and stood a moment looking with unutterable affection into his eyes.

"I—I want to be wise, dearest, for all our sakes, hers and yours and ours."

As by a flash of lightning he saw the implication of her words.

"Mother," he said with a concentrated intensity that frightened her. "I can't give up Katie. Ask me anything but that. I can't, and—and I won't—whatever happens."

"You won't do anything rash," she responded, patting his cheek. "You see darling," and her voice trembled, "you are all we have: you are everything to us. We live for you, for your happiness, and oh! my dear, as you love us, don't, don't disobey your father."

There was no need to ask more. He swayed as if falling: but quickly pulled himself together.

"There's stuff here for thought," he said. "I think I'd better have some fresh air to clear my brain."

He went out in a blaze of rebellion, and with no heed to direction turned southward, crossed Princes Street near its eastern end and held up over the North Bridge to the Old Town. At a street crossing he met Archy Gutteridge and three or four of his chosen companions, smug, ostentatiously respectable youths like himself. At sight of Lewis they whispered to one another, and he could see them starching up in abhorrence and contempt. An elfish desire to jeer seized him: but he kept his lips tight and his eyes averted and strode on. But he was subtly aware of their intention to cut him dead. Five minutes later he ran into Charlie who had been studiously consulting legal authorities in the Advocates' Library.

"Hullo," was Charlie's salutation. "Why these ruffled looks? What's the game now?"

"A hair of the dog that bit me," replied Lewis. "And a rousing big un too. My son, this is a jolly world. I have just met Archy of the red head and some of his pious chumps and they passed with lifted noses as if I were dirt. Think of that. In addition, in sweet addition there's a domestic earthquake, with no end of trouble ahead. Come along."

"Rather early, eh?" suggested Charlie.

"Early?" echoed Lewis. "When was a friendly visit too early for Bolem? I have a jolly good mind to start a tavern of my own—just in the general interest of humanity. The flowing bowl, my son, the flowing bowl. 'I wonder what the vintners buy one half so precious as the stuff they sell.' Come on."

Bolem did not fail them.

"And where now?" asked Charlie, when they came forth again refreshed.

"Anywhere," was the reply. "I don't care a damn if it's the everlasting bonfire."

Charlie chuckled. "Too hot for us northerns. Besides no need to anticipate things."

"Then suppose we say Portobello, the Port of Gold, or Queensferry. No, by Jove, the exchequer won't run to train-fares and convivial etceteras. Only let us get off somewhere, somewhere lest I bust on your hands."

CHAPTER XXXVI

FOR convenience and yet more for cheapness they chose the Calton Hill. The morning had been clammily misty, with a suggestion of fishy "haar" from the sea: but now the sun was out, and a brisk, invigorating breeze blew. Low-down sea gulls circled and cried weirdly, and high up larks filled the air with music. About them the ancient city was a shimmer of gleaming steeples, flashing roofs, and iridescent smoke. In the lee of the Nelson monument they found a vacant bench and took possession. As they sat down Charlie nudged and pointed to a striding figure not more than sixty or seventy yards off.

"Your friend and admirer, Erchy of the red head," he remarked. "Out to commune with nature, the pious, cultured dear."

"Out insulting the face of heaven with his pharasaical smugness," corrected Lewis. "I'd just like to go over and punch his red head to a yet deeper color. The skunk. Bagh! he makes the very air stink."

"I'm not here to countenance murder," said Charlie crisply. "There, be composed, be serene; he has taken himself off out of sight."

Lewis did not even smile. The mood of bravado had passed, the mood that was his general sheet-anchor in time of trouble. His brow was puckered and gloomy. The sum of his wrongs rose up before him, darkening the sunlight, making levity impossible. With Charlie who understood him, shared so many of his secrets, he was no longer at pains to dissemble his feelings. After a curious, brooding silence he suddenly broke out.

"Charlie, they insult me to-day, cry me down, treat me as if I were some unclean leperous thing from some foul lower world. And why? Because I despise and defy them, because I refuse to bow down before their gods, their piddling little gods, of mud and dirt."

"It's a way they have," said Charlie dubiously.

"Well! they may gird and miscall me to-day. But to-morrow! Listen Charlie, I don't want to boast, but unless death steps in and nicks the thread, the time is coming when they'll sing to another tune. Ay, and it would be like the cad who cuts me to be loudest of all in his singing.[1] I am talking big, Charlie. You may think I am talking wild, but as Heaven sees me I mean it."

"And you'll make it come true," said Charlie, all at once sobered to gravity.

"I have sworn it," said Lewis, his tone vibrating, the light of a great resolution in his eyes. "And, Charlie, there is one thing I have never done and never will do, so help me God! and that is to falsify my oath to myself. I will do what I have resolved to do or die in trying. One or the other."

"You will keep your oath," said Charlie with unwonted fervor. "I am sure the day is coming when, yes, when we'll a' be prood o' Robin."

He paused oddly and then went on. "There's something I must tell you. Last night I dreamed a dream and what do you thing I saw? A row, a whole shelf-full of beautiful books in beautiful crimson binding."

"The Waverley novels," said Lewis. "You have been reading Scott."

"No, not the Waverley novels," returned Charlie, on a note of excitement. "But like them in appearance. The

[1] It has happened as he foresaw.

backs bore labels, and on the labels, printed clear and large, Lewis it made my heart jump to see it, was the author's name. You wouldn't guess it.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

There's a dream for you."

Lewis stared at him a full minute without speaking or winking.

"I wonder," he said. Then slowly, "I wonder. Eh! my God, Charlie, if I could only—— But as you say, it was only a dream."

"All great things are dreams till they become accomplished facts," observed Charlie. "I take leave to regard that vision as prophetic. And when it comes true the Pharisees and hypocrites, the respectable sneaks who haven't the guts to be what they'd like to be, will cease to fleer and gibe and take to boasting. Yes, and what's more they'll be remembered wholly and solely because of their association with the man who was once cut by cads who should be kicked. And the same good fortune will be mine."

"You flatter——" Lewis was beginning: but Charlie flashed fiercely.

"It's a lie."

Lewis grasped his hand with a grip of iron.

"Oh! my dear Charlie, my dear good Horatio, thank God for a friend."

He paused, fumbled a moment, and went on.

"Only, Charlie, the dream, yours and mine, may not come true, and if I fail, as fail I may, in the great enterprise, if I experience what Keats, and he knew, calls the fiercest of hells, if I go down mid-ocean it'll be with flag flying; depend on that. Should that happen you'll tell

my story, won't you? God and you know it has black spots: don't hide them, Charlie; be as frank in telling of my life as I am in living it. Never mind the cackling of old wives whatever their sex. The story may encourage some poor devil in the future, fighting as I have to fight now. And, and Charlie, don't think it vanity or a vain ambition but I shouldn't like my name just to be writ in water. You understand?"

"Yes," said Charlie, quite shaken out of his usual manner. "I understand."

"I don't know what is going to happen," continued Lewis. "I don't know whether it's to be sink or swim with me. One hour I am crest high in a hope which exhilarates beyond words: the next I am in a pit of despair. Don't think me an ass for talking like this. You are my friend, the only one I have to stand by me in this pestilent place. Poor Ishmael hasn't many friends."

"I am honored," said Charlie, not too steadily.

"Oh! you boundless, generous-hearted liar," was the tingling response. "Friends we are and friends we'll remain to the end. Charlie, to the end, bitter or glad whichever it may be. Your hand on that."

And they gripped hands like a pair of vices.

Lewis reverted to the dream.

"It has about as much chance of coming true," he remarked wistfully, "as you have of being transported to Heaven in a chariot of fire."

"And that's nil," gurgled Charlie, recovering his customary manner. "That mode of transport has long been out of date. No more Elishas or was it Elijah?"

Lewis ignored the jest.

"What right have I to hope or aspire, with the devil

and his hell-hounds after me savage for blood. You may almost hear them yelping."

Charlie regarded him with a bantering look which yet was serious.

"Feeling a bit blue to-day," he observed.

"Blue," retorted Lewis. "Blue isn't the color. It's black, black and damned. So the elect have decreed. Macbeth murdered sleep. What should be done to the poisonous snakes who murder peace and happiness, and go about ruining reputations with their venomous slime?"

"Skin 'em alive," suggested Charlie pleasantly. "Roast 'em like witches, or if that's too mild, seethe them in boiling lead. Likely that would put them out of action."

"'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished and most richly merited," said Lewis. "I suppose it's no use scotching snakes."

Charlie laughed.

"Scotching Scotch snakes. My dear boy, it would be no more to them than a flea bite to an elephant. Tough Calvinistic hides. They'd be up and at it again worse than ever. But what's the little comedy now? You have omitted to tell me."

Lewis burst into harsh laughter.

"Oh! the very stuff of mirth, a comedy to make the fiends chortle. The snakes have been deluging me with the contents of their poison bags, and as the Irishman said, there's the devil to pay and nothing to pay him with. Do you catch on?"

"Vaguely," replied Charlie, with a puzzled look.

"Heavens! I wish it were vague to me. Have the blunt, unsavory truth then. According to well authenticated reports I keep shameful company. Put that feather

in your cap. In addition it is established that I have gone and bestowed my valuable affections where it's damnation even to cast a look. Twig?"

"Umph!" grunted Charlie with a world of meaning. "Does *she* know?"

"Does she know? That sounds as if you didn't know me. Is it likely I'd go to her with the smug face of a Pharisee and say, 'I am sorry. This must stop. I can't love you any more. I have discovered that I am far too respectable for the like of you. Good-by.' That would be gallantry for you."

He laughed stridently.

"Hypocrisy *à la mode*. But Charlie, I'm such a damn fool I have no desire to be respectable at the expense of honor, just as I have no desire to be a hypocrite or a coward or a cad, just to stand well with other hypocrites, cowards, and cads."

"So it's come to that?" said Charlie significantly.

"That—and more," replied Lewis. "Ever so much more. But they can't frighten me. If I know myself at all I'm not a jellyfish. Let them do their damndest.

> "The kirk and state may join and tell,
> To do such things I mauna:
> The kirk and state may go to hell.
> But I'll go to my Anna.

"So that's that," he said, the old ring of defiance in his voice. But next minute his mood had changed again.

"So, you see Charlie," he said, with a queer wistful little smile. "If ever I needed a friend it's now. Poor Tom's a-cold."

CHAPTER XXXVII

WITH Lewis the black fits might be sharp, but they were always short. His light, resilient temperament, the effervescent egotism which so often embarrassed his friends and gave his enemies the chance to scoff; the rebel doctrines so dearly nursed and cherished; above all the indomitable, inflexible will, which was adamant under a deceptive surface of froth and frivolity—these were an effective sheet-anchor against despondency. It might besiege: it could not vanquish. A hundred times he reiterated to himself the boast: "They cannot depress me: they cannot. I defy them." If you are not to be depressed then it must follow as the night the day you are not to be cowed by any threatenings of fortune.

Storms, probably worse than any that went before, were now brewing by the domestic hearth. He sensed a tearing tempest, as Job's war horse sniffed the battle, and with the same defiant ha, ha, let it burst. If it had to come then the quicker the better. He was not to be disheartened, far less dismayed or turned aside. Not by running away, nor yet by cowardly halts and hesitations in going forward, do brave men fulfil their ambitions, secure the desires of their hearts. Fate, womanlike, ducks to courage. Audacity, audacity and always audacity. That was the winning slogan. And his mind was made up—irrevocably. In that heroic mood he girded himself for the fight which he knew was at hand.

The expected, we know, often comes with a shock of surprise, as when the first hostile gun booms and breaks the silence of expectant armies. Returning home braced,

as he felt, for anything, Lewis let himself in with his latchkey, whistling softly. As he opened the door the whistling ceased abruptly in the middle of a bar. For fronting him in the hall, as if waiting for him, stood his father, formidable and lowering.

"So you have come," was the grim greeting. "I want a word with you. Come in here."

Turning he pushed open a door at the rear. "We can talk here without being heard by the whole house. Get in."

By nature, as he boasted, Lewis was not subordinate. The peremptory tone offended him, and for one hot rebellious moment he held back. Then remembering that on occasion prudence may be the best policy, he obeyed with a very creditable show of readiness.

With the same hard, set expression his father shut the door, pointed imperiously to a chair, and sat down himself. Lewis held his breath, as a boxer holds it, facing his opponent in the moment of attack. At the same time a vision of Katie flashed upon him, as though to inspire by reminding him of all that was at stake. Thrilling hot and cold together he nerved himself. The battle threatened to be even harder than he had expected.

Had Nature, in ironic mood, designed an incongruous contrast between father and son she could scarcely have achieved a more signal triumph than in the two men who now faced each other. The one, hewn, as it might seem, out of the native rock, massive, craggy browed, rough edged, of iron aspect, ill to oppose: the other a rag of a youth, girl faced, foreign looking, with the bright eyes and restless alertness of a squirrel, accentuated by a smile of cultivated levity—they suggested a humorous experiment in contraries. And in mind the contrast was yet sharper than in body.

For a full minute they sat in silence, a silence, as Lewis was acutely aware, charged with all the elements of disaster.

"Been keeping an appointment, I suppose," said his father, his looks like daggers. And then before an answer could come. "Man! it's the fine appointments you keep these days, by what folk say."

"What do they say, Father?"

His father's brow contracted blackly and his strong jaw seemed to harden.

"What do they say? They say things that make faces in this house burn. Let me tell you something. This afternoon I came slinking home by back streets to avoid people I was ashamed to meet—because of what they say. You're a son to be proud of, a son to be proud of."

"But what are they saying?" Lewis demanded again. "I have a right to know."

Only too well he knew what they said, but one may gain time and collect one's wits by asking questions.

"Oh! to be sure, to be sure," assented his father. "Well! I'll tell you what they are saying. To begin with they're saying that you're an atheist, a ramping, roaring atheist, and that you're so proud of yourself you go spouting your atheism in public houses—public houses," he repeated, dwelling on the words with extraordinary bitterness. "Oh! I hear you have a great reputation for making game of everything that decent folk believe. You insult your Maker, just to make drunken idiots laugh. They say you're a first-class hand at the job—and you in drink. It's a fine achievement."

Lewis wriggled, but instinctively and from habit he also smiled.

"Ay, it's a good joke," commented his father with concentrated scorn. "That's what they say, a good joke.

My son going round the riff-raff of public houses mouthing blasphemies like—like a clown. Do they give you drink for it? They should."

Lewis sprang to his feet. "Father," he cried hotly, "that is insulting."

"Sit down and be quiet," ordered his father peremptorily; and as Lewis, yielding for the moment to superior force, fell back into his seat: "Tell me this, did you ever learn your blasphemy in my house?"

"No," said Lewis.

"Or from any soul belonging to me?"

"No."

"Then where did you pick it up?"

"Oh!" replied Lewis, affecting a fine air. "One thinks and learns for one's self."

His father snorted in fierce contempt. "Ay, one thinks for one's self and of course understands the secrets of the universe better than Him who made it. Very clever. Oh! most awfully clever. Well! go on."

"What I meant, sir," said Lewis, fumbling a little, "is that old ideas and creeds become obsolete. The world moves."

"Ay," agreed his father again. "As you say, the world moves. Once in every twenty-four hours it revolves on its own axis. And who guides it wheeling in space among a million other worlds, world upon world, world upon world, every one of them with its own flaming sun? Is it the jeering idiots who fuddle themselves in public houses, think you? Are they the people and will wisdom die with them?"

"You are pleased to be sarcastic, sir," said Lewis doubtfully.

"Sarcastic," echoed his father. "I'm sick: I'm nearer

vomiting than you'd think. But you're up-to-date. You, and others like you, have done away with Heaven and hell as old wives' fables. Have you abolished the devil as well?"

"I wish it were possible, sir," said Lewis, smiling dubiously.

"Ay," said his father, with cutting irony. "You'd spare him."

Lewis was protesting again: but his father silenced him with a gesture:

"No, you can't do away with the devil, but you think God is negligible. Well! I don't. I honor and reverence Him to the best of my ability. You deny Him, and you do it in public houses, to the foul mirth of mocking fools who egg you on to their own damnation and yours."

For a moment Lewis was almost conscience stricken: but he had his own notions of things. Moreover he suffered from a rankling sense of injustice.

"Because one cannot swallow superstition," he was beginning: but his father cut in sternly.

"What's that? Superstition? Am I to be told in my own house by my own son that the Christian Religion is a superstition?"

"You go too fast, sir," protested Lewis. "I did not say that?"

"What did you say then? You spoke of swallowing superstition, what does that mean?"

"Perhaps I expressed myself badly, sir. But you cannot deny that the cloak of religion is made to cover a vast deal of black, rotten, despicable hypocrisy. And as to drink, not so long ago a Royal Chaplain was put to bed drunk at Holyrood, and only the other day during the Assembly a minister was picked up out of the gutter, ooz-

ing whiskey like a leaky barrel. Yet both would preach at others. They, sir, are the people who make scoffers and infidels."

"They'll have to answer for it," retorted his father. "And they're no warrant for you."

"Quite true, sir," admitted Lewis. "But if they and others like them, who are so concerned about the mote in my eye, would pluck the beam out of their own it would be all the better for the cause of honesty and sincerity, which, as I understand it, are the soul of religion. I loathe and abhor the whole tribe of hypocrites. And let me add this, that if I had half their art of hiding this interview would not be taking place."

"Hypocrites are weeds that grow in every soil," commented his father curtly. "They'll get their reward. I'll own they're no models for us."

Lewis saw his opportunity and leaped to it.

"There, sir, we are absolutely at one. I give you my word of honor you will never find me in the ranks of the hypocrites, if I can help it."

"That's something. But it's our own conduct, not theirs, that we have to look to."

He paused, his eyes seeming to pierce Lewis as though to frustrate any attempt at evasion or equivocation. Then in a voice such as Lewis had never heard from him before. "Yes, it's our own conduct that concerns us. And it seems clowning and blasphemy are not your only amusements. What's this I hear of you and a woman you've taken up with? Who is she?"

For an instant the breath was struck out of Lewis; but he rallied bravely.

"I presume, sir, you mean——" He got no further.

"You presume. Yes, there's a deal of presumption

going. I mean her that you picked up, or that picked you up, in Tobias Bolem's public house. You see I am well informed. And eh! but that was a fine place to meet her, a fine place," he repeated with a ferocity of scorn that sent a freezing shudder through Lewis.

"Will you let me explain, sir?" he faltered, instinctively falling back on the soft answer that turneth away wrath. It was unavailing.

"Explain," cried his father, and it seemed he was in danger of exploding. "I want no explanations. What I want is a plain answer to a plain question. Who is she?" And as Lewis appeared to hesitate. "Ay, that boggles you. Well! since you're dumb I may tell you I know *what* she is—according to report."

Lewis swallowed something that was dreadfully hard to get down. Between one thing and another he was feeling a trifle giddy.

"I hope, sir," he got out at last, "you won't believe all you hear."

"If I did," was the retort, "it would be short shrift for you. But in this matter I have no choice. The scandal is running like wildfire. It is in everybody's mouth. It meets me everywhere in looks, in manners and in words. Bolem's public house, the French den by the Calton Hill, with all they mean. God! I wish I could be blind and deaf to them."

Lewis's nails were digging into the palms of his hands: the cold sweat was beginning to ooze on his forehead. Nevertheless he kept a brave front, for he remembered who and what he was defending.

"I wish you could judge for yourself," he ventured. "If only you met her——"

"Met her," interrupted his father. "It would need

but that of it to make me an accomplice. Met her! God forbid I should ever meet her or set eyes on her. And that minds me. A minute ago we spoke of presumption. You had the presumption to bring her here—here to my house, imposing on your mother and insulting me when I was out of the way. I think your folly must be making you insane. Well! I'll tell you this, if I had been at home she'd have got the door in double-quick time, and maybe you with her."

This was too much. Lewis leaped up in flaming defence.

"That is going too far," he cried. "You have no right——"

"Sit down," thundered his father, and there was something in tone and mien which compelled obedience. "You're a talker, oh! a grand talker when you get going; but this time you've got to listen. And to cut a long, black story short here's the position. You are running round like an idiot disgracing yourself and me and all belonging to you. If you were younger I'd thrash a little sense into you. As I can't do that I must adopt other means. The question is what I'm to do with you? You're not fit for lighthouse engineering. You've proved that. The sea would laugh at you. You can't talk down the sea. It seems you're not going to be fit for the law either. I promised you £1000 the day you pass advocate. I may keep it. What's £1000 against the pleasure of being a fool, and doing the devil's bidding?"

Lewis, rebellious and quivering, made an attempt to break in but once more was peremptorily silenced.

"Not a word. I'm not going to listen. I'm past listening. I have listened too long and endured too long. Now here's what I have to say. You have your choice of

obeying me in whatever I decide, or shutting the door of my house behind you for good. One or the other."

Lewis stared with a look of utter stupefaction, his jaw dropping. For a moment his courage, his vaunted self-possession forsook him. In a delicate crisis, an ultimatum delivered, as it were straight from the shoulder, yes that pulls one up with a jerk, disturbs one's poise and serenity. A beating silence fell, both men regarding each other. Then of a sudden the older man got up and began to pace the room, his face twitching.

"You see what you have laid upon me," he said, not too steadily, halting and looking down on his son. "I don't want to say more now." (He could not, being at the breaking point and afraid to trust himself.) "Get back to your law books till—till we see."

Lewis rose, bowed and without a word left the room.

His father sat down, staring at the closed door. A long time he sat thus motionless. Then of a sudden he bent forward, covering his face with his hands, and his great shoulders heaved.

"Oh! my son Absalom," he moaned. "Oh! Absalom, my son, my son."

The door opened and his wife entered, but he did not hear her. Neither did he hear the swift step of terror that brought her to his side. Kneeling she took his hand.

"Oh! my dear! What is it?" she asked, in a voice tense with fear. "Has—has Lewis been with you?"

He lifted his face and looked at her tragically.

"Yes," he answered, "Lewis has been with me."

Back in his own room Lewis sat down, took his head in his hands, and thought, or rather blazed in a fury of resentment. In his heart he scarcely blamed his father, whose mind, he told himself, was poisoned. Who were the

poisoners? Who but the sneaks who make scandal and censoriousness the chief ingredients in their religion. By God, let them take care: if he turned on them there would be a tale to tell. Slimy hypocrisy, sneaking vice, sham virtue, prurient respectability, Bacchus and Venus amid Saturday night debaucheries: Bacchus and Venus, with smug self-righteous faces, in the mid-most of the Kirk on Sunday! There was stuff for the satirist. They had better not provoke him to revenge.

He leaped to his feet and began to pace the room. "Damn them," he said aloud. "Curse them. May their tongues wither at the root—the vipers."

He felt caged, almost like a victim of the stocks at whom every gaping fool could jeer. And all because he was without money. Money meant freedom, independence, happiness. How much had he? Turning out his pocket on the table he counted like a miser. One shilling, two sixpences, two three-penny bits, five pennies, and one ha'penny—total two shillings and elevence ha'penny. He laughed bitterly at his helplessness.

A little while he stood quite still as if contemplating the spectacle of his own defeat. Then on a fierce rebound there sprang from the chaos the real Lewis, the man who was not to be depressed nor bullied nor brow-beaten into submission. Helpless? Had he not still the best, the only vital resource a man can have—himself? Who trusts himself unflinchingly in the time of trial possesses the faith which removes mountains. A forlorn hope? He would prove that a forlorn hope was but the prelude to victory. He had lost his heart, but would keep his head. They ordered, dictated, threatened. Well and good. Somehow, by hook or by crook, by his mother's aid, or otherwise he would prevail.

One thing was clear as noon. The ultimatum was aimed not so much at him as at Katie. And he was to be the instrument of execution. A pretty plan, oh! a very pretty plan. But did they imagine for an instant that he was to be frightened or coerced into such baseness, such cowardice, such treachery? A poor compliment to his honor, his manhood. Well! they would see. Not while he had breath to draw would he play the cad: never, NEVER, NEVER.

On that burning resolution he sat down and wrote a hurried, emphatic note to Katie making an appointment for next day. "Do not fail," he said. "I want you particularly. I depend upon you." Then watching his chance he stole out and posted his letter. As it dropped into the box he thrilled exultantly. He had taken the first step in crossing his Rubicon.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

KATIE kept the appointment punctually. That night she was to sing at the howff (it was now a nightly appearance, such was her success): but Lewis peremptorily cancelled the engagement.

"Not to-night, love of my heart," he told her radiantly. "By all the gods, not to-night. They'll have to go without their songs. To-night I wouldn't give you up for anything or anybody on earth."

She smiled at him puzzled, anxious, secretly dissenting and yet in her heart pleased.

"Why, Louis?"

"For many reasons. But take two: first because you are mine, absolutely my own, you understand: next because I have something big to propose, something tremendously big. The Fates are spinning for us to-day, sweetheart o' mine."

"Why, what has happened?" she asked with a quiver half of alarm, half of eager anticipation.

"That's too big a tale at present," he replied. "It's what's going to happen that matters." And for the moment he would say no more. Somehow it did not occur to her to protest or argue that she must keep her engagement: his manner swept her off her feet.

"And where would you like to go, Louis?" she said, as though she had neither will nor choice of her own.

"Anywhere so long as I have you to myself. I know," he added in the next breath. "That quiet, rocky, wooded spot beyond Portobello where you were once so saucy to me. Mighty hoity-toity that time."

He laughed boisterously. "Don't frown, sweet.

That's all dead and done with forever and forever, as Mr. Tennyson observes. Let's go there, by the wild sea and music in its roar. To-day, my love, I feel in tune with the elements, and damn the wisdom of fools."

He was, indeed, in elemental mood, as though the foundations of his nature had been shaken and tossed up to sun and wind. The Old Adam that lurks in the secret recesses of humanity, watching his chance, was up and inciting to madness.

"Don't be bluffed," he seemed to say. "Don't let a craven prudence hinder you. I am old and you are young, and this is wisdom. Seize your opportunities. Take your pleasures while you may."

They took train to Portobello, ironically so named; thence they walked swiftly along the sands to the lonely spot which was their objective.

"Here we are," said Lewis, his face radiant, his pulses beating like drums. "The very rock on which I found you sitting, gazing out to sea, rapt in meditation. Were you by any chance thinking of me?"

Her eyes looked frankly into his.

"It was of you I was thinking, Louis."

He laughed in sheer ecstasy.

"Yet you fled from me like a frightened fawn. Come, don't pout. I have told you that bygones are bygones."

He kissed her with headlong passion.

"Oh! suppose someone is watching," she cautioned.

"I'll scout round and see there are no picnics about," he said meaningly. He did and reported that the coast was clear, the solitude complete.

"We are alone," he told her. "You and I, and not a human eye to spy on us."

They found a place beside the rock on which she had

once sat brooding. Lewis flung himself on a mossy bed, leaning on his elbow, with hat thrown down, and Katie sat close to him, her knees clasped in both hands. For a little while they were silent, gazing out to sea; as if it were enough to be together.

The tide was full, lapping and murmuring in white-crested wavelets almost at their feet. The sea, still as a tropical lagoon in a dead calm, gleamed like a great mirror of molten silver, touched here and there with gold and the first faint suggestion of sunset rose. On the horizon a sail stood out, like a black swan, with white outspread wings, floating at ease. Katie sighed softly.

"How lovely, how peaceful," she observed in a low voice. "It seems almost like another Eden."

"And we the sole occupants," responded Lewis, looking quickly up at her.

"It is very sweet," she mused. "What a pity it couldn't be always just like this. One would never think life could be so hard at times."

"My love," said Lewis, with a nearer movement. "We haven't come here to think of the hardness of life. Let us forget it. Come closer."

She bent toward him, so that in his recumbent position she looked down on him. And as she gazed a great wave of tenderness came over her. He seemed so boyishly irresponsible, so much in need of her guidance and protection; and he was hers, hers. She put out a hand and stroked his face; then absent-mindedly began to run her fingers through his hair. He put out an arm and pulled down her head, so that her cheek rested on his.

"You love me, sweetheart?" he said, on a tense breath.

"You know, dearest," came the low sweet response.

"And you haven't forgotten your promise?"

"I never forget my promises."

"Then you are ready to keep it, to do anything for me, or go anywhere with me?"

"Anything or anywhere, Louis."

"Seal it with a kiss." And it was sealed.

"Well!" he said presently, sitting up and fixing his eyes on hers. "The time has come, the testing time, the time to keep your promise, Katie, my own. What do you say to getting married at once?"

"At once?" Her breath came with a gulp. "But dearest, we aren't ready, we have made no preparations: and what do your father and mother say?"

He laughed a trifle uneasily.

"What's the odds what they say? Our fate is in our own hands. We are free agents. We want each other," he added with burning emphasis, "and we're going to have each other, eh? Katie?"

As she was silent he went on. "No sense in delaying. Every hour we delay is so much lost happiness Nothing that others can say or do should be allowed to hinder us a single moment."

A sudden freezing fear shot through her.

"But, Louis, that wouldn't be right. Do your father and mother know?"

"Up to a point. They know just enough to be nasty."

"Nasty! Do they object?" The breath was stayed in her breast; her eyes were wide with sudden terror.

"What if they do?" he answered doggedly. "They can't prevent us."

"Then they do object?" The words seemed to rend her. "Louis dear, I think your mother is one of the sweetest, kindest women I have ever met. I wouldn't for anything hurt her. Be frank with me, dearest. They do object, don't they?"

She was quivering from sole to crown, quivering as one quivers in the very grip of Fate.

"Well!" he answered, with just a suggestion of impatience or testiness. "Since you must know, they do. In fact there's a little game afoot to separate us."

"Oh!" The single monosyllable was a cry of anguish. But instantly she recovered. "I want to know," she said, with desperate calm. "Tell me, Louis."

"Maybe it's right you should know," he admitted reluctantly. "The gist of the information is that there's been a rumpus with my father. I won't bother you with details, but here's the result. It seems I am in need of a change for my health's sake." He gave a harsh, kinky laugh. "So I'm to be transported somewhere out of the way. If I refuse to go I'm to be disowned."

"Transported. Disowned." The words sounded like a sentence of doom.

"That's the threat. Now hear the reply. It's this. That we get married at once. Then threats and objections will be no more than that." He snapped his fingers scornfully. "A couple of witnesses and the thing is done. You are mine, and those who object may whistle down the wind for their trouble."

She made no comment: his news froze her to stone; drove every vestige of color from her face.

"So you see, my dear," he went on, too intent on his own purpose to notice the effect on her. "All we need is courage, and we're not likely to fail in that, are we?"

Still she made no answer. For a full minute she sat silent, motionless; then suddenly with a wild cry of, "Oh! Louis, Louis, oh! my dear, my dear," she broke into a convulsion of sobbing, her face buried in her hands. Lewis caught her to him and she clasped him frantically

with trembling quivering arms. Misunderstanding her emotion he did his best to soothe her, telling himself that the shock of joy, the near prospect of consummated bliss was too much for her nerves.

"This very night," he told her in thrilling accents, "we'll clinch things. Then no one, no human power, can separate us. Think of it, my darling: this very night."

Katie did not answer, only held him the more frantically while her whole being shook as in an ague tenfold intensified.

Too excited himself to read her agitation aright, Lewis became more and more ardent, more and more urgent with pleas for immediate action. Why should they defer their happiness? They were not fools; they were not children. Love, as the great magician had divined, was not hereafter. It was now. And if they were bold enough, objectors would swing round and bless them. For the deed once done objections would vanish.

"To-night, Katie," he repeated again and again. "This very night. No use dallying. Let us decide to cross our Rubicon."

Katie listened in silence, making no attempt to stem the flood of his talk, the tide of his urgency. Somehow it seemed she had nothing to say, that her thoughts were a whirling chaos which could not be put into ordered, articulate speech. She found it hard to realize the meaning of what he was telling her so heatedly. Only in some vague way it spelled disaster.

In the confusion, however, one thing was clear—that blinded by love, love for her, Louis was bent on headlong folly, even at the risk of life-long regret. That must not be. It lay with her to be sensible, prudent (if prudence were possible), not for her own sake but for his. Some-

thing whispered that by falling in with his wishes for an immediate plunge she had all to gain and nothing to lose; but still more strongly, vehemently, something else whispered that love and honor alike laid on her the responsibility of being wise in this crisis. If necessary she must save Louis even from himself. That was her terrible task. On the way back Lewis's urgency became a compelling madness. She was quite sure he did not realize what he was saying or proposing. Therefore, tactfully and gently, she pleaded for time.

"Time!" he cried, as if resenting any hint of hesitation. "Good Lord! You're not afraid, are you?"

"No, dear, not afraid," was the quiet answer. "Don't put me down a coward."

"My word on that," he returned promptly. "Just looking before you leap. They say it's wise. But don't look too long. That's all."

He saw her to her modest lodging, and would have gone inside to announce to all and sundry the great event that was at hand: but Katie gently put him off, kissing him very tenderly for recompense.

"Anyway you are mine," he said, tingling in divine ecstasy. "That's settled."

"Yes, dearest, yours."

"Now and forever?"

"Now and forever," she repeated. "For time and eternity. Nothing can alter that."

CHAPTER XXXIX

UTTERLY unable to contain himself, feeling he must impart his rapture or go off in a blaze of spontaneous combustion, Lewis made a dash for Charlie.

"Congratulate the happiest man alive," he cried, bursting in on his friend who was alone with his law books. "It's all O.K. The die is cast. Don't stare like a stuck pig. I tell you it's O.K. The course of true love runs beautifully—maugre Master William Shakespeare. That's the joyful tidings, sonny."

Charlie looked into the flushed, excited, glowing face, his eyes twinkling. He knew these sudden fits.

"Ever since Adam won the maiden affections of Eve under the first apple tree," he observed with irritating deliberation, "the enraptured lover has been the happiest man alive. A sort of hallucination, I suppose. Glad you've proved Shakespeare wrong, though. Congratulations, of course."

"None of your damned cynicism," retorted Lewis. "In present circumstances it would pain me to brain you. Come along and celebrate, and come quick or I'll bust."

"A horrid mess to clean up," grinned Charlie, shutting Stubbs on "Charters" with a snap, and rising blithely. "That's how my chances of distinction in exams go. Never mind, what's law to a bit of jollity? Which is it to be, Bolem's or Frenchy's?"

"Frenchy's," answered Lewis promptly. "To-night I'm for the cosmopolitan touch. Bolem's a dear trustful soul. Entertains on tick, and doesn't get rude or make long faces either. A man and a brother; but a leetle bit parochial in his joviality. Lord!" he added, tingling

afresh with the realization of his own bliss. "It's a tavern among the stars that would suit me to-night."

"Know anything of the quality of the liquor up there?" inquired Charlie. "Well! I'm ready."

By the way Lewis told him breathlessly how matters stood, adding, "I count on you, Charlie, to stand by me."

"Yours to a cinder," replied Charlie cordially.

"You see," Lewis explained. "I'm taking your hint. Yes, a Scotch marriage: blessings on the man who invented it. It cuts the Gordian knot of difficulties and re-ties it, true-love fashion. First thing, I suppose, is to select our witnesses. Two will do."

At the word "witnesses" Charlie pulled up mentally.

"Ah!" he said. "Things are advanced to that point, eh?"

"Nothing left but to buckle to," was the ardent reply. "All hurdles leaped and no turning back. I have thrown down the gauntlet—though they don't know it yet."

Charlie made no comment. The time was not opportune: neither was Lewis's mood. But he could not help thinking of consequences.

They found Frenchy both angry and apologetic. Angry with his prima donna for failing him: apologetic to the valued patrons who had come expecting to see and hear her.

"And I haf made her pay beeger, beeger," he complained, shouting in the French style. "She most igsplain: she most apologize. I veel not haf my honored frients disappointed, *non*."

"Damn cheek," Lewis protested hotly in Charlie's ear. "Does the frowsy son of a frog-eating Frenchman think he owns her?"

"Prima donnas are kittle cattle," someone remarked with a chuckle. "Maybe she's owre the border and awa

wi' some Jock o' Hazledone. Ye never can trust them when men are aboot."

Lewis was almost on his feet in vehement contradiction, but again contented himself with a fierce negative in Charlie's ear.

A shrill feminine laugh broke on the talk. "Oh! ask Velvet Coat. Likely he knows."

The speaker was his old friend the amazon. But Lewis, becoming suddenly wise, kept tight lips. They were very cute, but they couldn't draw him. He smiled at thought of his own secret.

Like love, appetite, and some other mortal things, the social instinct grows by what it feeds on. Lewis was so extremely sociable, so utterly oblivious of all external things that the hours passed with him unheeded. It was with a shock of surprise he heard Charlie's, "Time to go."

"Already?" he exclaimed; but next instant added mentally. "Good! So many hours nearer the consummation of bliss."

They went out into the empty street. The night was calm and inviting, a jewel of a night for chilly, windy Edinburgh. There was no moon: but the sky was darkly clear and thick-sown with stars. Lewis looked up quizzically as if twitting the heavens.

"Twinkle, twinkle little star," he began: but broke off. "I wonder if anybody up there looks down and takes note. If so how damn funny the whole show must seem to him."

"The very height of comedy, I am sure," agreed Charlie. "Pretty elevated yourself to-night, eh?"

"Treading the celestial way, on and always on," returned Lewis with a lofty gesture. "Charlie, old man, there are splendid things, sweet, precious things in life, if you only know how to grab 'em."

"I suppose it's mostly a case of grabbing," said Charlie significantly. But Lewis was far too deeply absorbed with his own thoughts to notice mere inflections of voice.

By an ingenious stratagem on his part they made a detour so as to pass Katie's lodging. Her window was still lighted.

"Up there she's thinking of me," he told Charlie. "Oh! for Apollo's lute, or was it the lyre, the god played? that I might do a fitting serenade. But I am not musical. The Jew's harp is the top of my accomplishment, and a bit jarry at that."

He kissed his hand to the little window, tucked high under the eaves.

"Sweet sleep, my love, and dreams of the lad who is waiting."

He did not guess, he could not imagine that in the very moment when he stood ecstatically apostrophizing her, Katie, lonely and dejected, was praying with all her soul for strength and courage to bear the ordeal of a great renunciation. Renunciation was the last thing in the world he would have admitted even to the vestibule of his thoughts.

They turned away, and in a fresh access of excitement Lewis talked of the event, now so near, which was at once to secure his everlasting happiness and be a challenge of defiance flung at futile objectors. Charlie listened dutifully, making no attempt to interrupt. At last when the rushing flood of speech abated, he remarked:

"This is something to sleep on. I'm too tired and sleepy to take it all in. See you to-morrow."

Lewis almost broke into derision. Tired and sleepy! Tired and sleepy with such events in the wind! Good Lord! Charlie was a good fellow, a first rate fellow,

staunch as the Bass Rock, but at times a little, little bit stupid, the dear soul. His saving grace was that he was infinitely good natured.

"All right," said Lewis, in jovial concession. "To-morrow morning then. I'll call for you. There's much to be done. It's dazzling work, sonny, climbing the pathway of the sun."

"Dazzling work," assented Charlie, holding out his hand.

Fifteen minutes later Lewis descended from the clouds at the door of his home, opened it cautiously, and stepped into the hall which was still lighted. With a shock of surprise and annoyance he came face to face with his father: but his greeting was resolutely cheerful.

"Hullo! sir. Not in bed yet?"

There was no response. His father stood regarding him, grim faced, silent, with a deadly silence that held a smouldering fire of anger. For half a minute he remained thus, looking daggers at Lewis. Then with a sweep of the hand he pointed peremptorily upstairs.

CHAPTER XL

NEXT morning two things happened which were not at all in accordance with Lewis's well-laid schemes. His father requested an immediate interview; and a disquieting little note reached him from Katie, the first she had ever ventured to address to him openly.

The interview with his father was brief, stern and pungently to the point.

"To-day," he was told in tones meant to indicate that opposition would no longer be brooked. "To-day I will make the necessary arrangements. To-morrow you will leave Edinburgh. Your destination will be made known to you when arrangements are complete, and you will remain away until such time as I give you permission to return. I suppose we must concoct some story about your health. Your mother will help you to pack, and you have my authority to get whatever things you may need."

Lewis spluttered in protest: such treatment was outrageous: but a look and a gesture silenced him.

"Those are my conditions. Refuse them if you like, only remember that if you do my house can no longer be your home. That is the decision which your folly or your imbecility, I don't know which, has forced upon me. Don't interrupt please. The time for talk is past. Now begin to get ready."

And with that Parthian shot, delivered over his shoulder the dictator walked away.

"Tart," said Lewis to himself, suppressed rebellion swelling up within him, now that he was alone. "Might as well make it Botany Bay transportation and be done with it."

Then he laughed as a hurt, but still defiant man, laughs. They might turn him out: he supposed that was in their power; but they could not change his mind nor turn him aside from his purpose. That accomplished perhaps they would come to their senses and accept the inevitable.

In surging revolt he opened and read Katie's letter. As he read his heart stood still, and then suddenly pounded, making his head swim.

"Ever beloved Louis," the note ran. "I am trying, dearest, to be brave and sensible: but oh! it is so hard. Beloved, you are everything to me, my whole world, my whole life. I think of you night and day. Without you it would be all darkness. But, dearest——"

And there followed a pathetic plea for patience and regard for the feelings of others. Time aiding, she would prove to objectors that she was worthy of him and them. Then they should all be happy together, ideally happy. But to be forced upon people who did not want her or were actually hostile was more than she could endure.

"My head seems to be bursting," she added. "But it isn't half so sore as my heart. Help me to be brave: I need courage, beloved. Oh! Louis how I love you. It hurts like physical pain, but not for a thousand worlds would I be without it. Your love, dearest, is all I have to live for."

A piteous cry of distracted, anguished affection. The very handwriting in its jerky, spasmodic lines seemed to quiver.

"Poor little girl," thought Lewis, pained yet flattered. "Poor little girl! Lost her nerve a bit." He would soon set her right.

He knew that notwithstanding her cry for courage she was inherently brave and steel-true. Her present mood

was a passing spasm of fear. She would rise, she must rise, to the height of his great adventure and hers.

As in flashes of lightning he thought of ways and means. At every turn hitherto lack of cash had always cramped and hindered him. Now, however, as in irony, fortune was actually aiding. To make the sentence of banishment effective funds must be provided. He thrilled in dare-devil elation. With money in his purse what could he not do? One thing he could and would do was to turn their own weapons against his judges, his oppressors. He would spirit Katie away: and presto! the privilege of making conditions would lie with him. He had an appointment with her: but the time was still hours distant. It was impossible to wait: he must see her at once and remove her fears and scruples.

His mother entered and he greeted her boisterously.

"It seems we have to do some packing to-day, oh! Mother of mine," he cried. "Interesting and exciting."

She regarded him anxiously.

"Yes, dear, your father and I both think a little holiday will do you good."

He laughed. "Matchless father and mother. A holiday is a delightful prospect, though I haven't the ghost of a notion where I'm going. Hope the place will be pleasant anyway. I'm to be fitted out, I believe, and as there's no time to lose I'll get started—if you have cash handy."

He pocketed some bank notes and a handful of silver. Then kissing his mother, rather perfunctorily as she felt, he left her. He had never been so rich. A pocketful of real hard cash. Ha, ha! put money in thy purse. The old villain Iago was right. Money made the mare go: money meant independence: it was the real, the only magician. The world ducked obediently to the man of cash.

On his way out he met Cummy, who as confidential factotum had wind of what was going on.

"I'm telt yer for leaving us a whilie," she observed, her face grave and slightly troubled.

"So I hear, Cummy," he returned, scarcely staying on his step. "But like a bad penny I'll be back on your hand in no time." And he sped away laughing. Cummy sighed deeply.

"He has a daft look in his eye," she told herself. "I dinna like it. It's that lassie. Crazy—that's what he is. And I nursed him—for the like o' this. I suppose it's the Lord's will that young folks can never be wise: but it's awfae tryin'."

When he called Katie was out. Her landlady, Mrs. Micklebait, interviewed him on the doorstep, and deftly, after the manner of her kind, she turned the interview into a searching examination. She was a gaunt, gray, worried woman of ambiguous age who found the eternal problem of making ends meet a depressing one. Nevertheless, she retained her full quota of native curiosity. To Lewis's question whether she knew where Katie was she answered:

"Ye'll be her sweetheart, I'm thinkin'? I have heard o' ye."

Lewis smiled politely. The penalties of fame must be borne.

"Yer baith unco young for the coortin'," she added, surveying him critically.

"Oh!" returned Lewis, with a yet politer smile. "Learn young, learn fair, you know."

"Ay, and whiles learn mair nor's good for ye," observed Mrs. Micklebait significantly. "Weel! I dinna ken where she's off to. She's no' very communicative, as ye'd say. Keeps hersel till hersel. No but me and her

has cracks whiles when she's helpin' aboot the hoose. She's a handy and winsome bit lassie." Then with a keener look. "I'm jalousin' she didna sleep owre weel last nicht. Ye haenae been nesty till her?"

Lewis promptly repudiated the base suggestion.

"Ah! weel!" continued Mrs. Micklebait, as if she had doubts on the point. "It's my opeenion she wasna in bed at a'. I heard her trampin' her floor late, though it's a licht fit she has, and this mornin' when I gaed in early there was her bed a' made up and tidy. I got the notion it hadnae ben sleepit in."

"Oh!" said Lewis, with a little thrill of alarm. "She's not ill, is she?"

"That's as may be," was the enigmatic answer. "She's no o' the complainin' kind. But if you was to ask me I'd say she had a good greet till hersel. It's sair unchancy for a lassie when she begins to fash aboot men. It's a thing to lose sleep owre. I've been through the mill," she added grimly.

Lewis looked at her quizzically, wondering if that gaunt, grizzled, harassed body had ever throbbed with the ecstasy of romance.

"Thank you," he said abruptly, and saluting he turned away.

"Wull I say ye were speirin'?" the lady called after him, scenting an interesting secret.

"N-no, thanks," he answered. "Don't trouble. Perhaps I may see her."

"Queer lookin'," remarked Mrs. Micklebait, *sotto voce,* as he strode off. "I'd take him for a foreigner. No the kind o' man I'd choose for myself if I was doin' it owre again. Weel, weel! ilka ane to her ain creel o' fish."

Suddenly and viciously she called over her shoulder. "Stop yer skirlin' in by there, like a menagerie o' yammerin' monkeys." And the door shut with a bang.

An hour before Katie had fled from the skirling and banging which hurt like hammer strokes on her brain.

Once out of view Lewis halted to consider the situation. Was Katie taking fright? It was impossible she could rue: but naturally perhaps, she would be agitated. As to her tears, didn't girls often weep from sheer excess of happiness? It was a foible of the sex, like the taste for sweets or perfume or jewellery. The darlings had their peculiarities. But he had only to see Katie, to smile at her, to whisper magic words in her ear, and there would be no more doubt, no more hesitation.

He thrust his hand into his pocket, and the touch of money, not in beggarly shillings and pence but in pounds sterling, sent a throb of exultation through him. He was rich; he was a capitalist: he commanded the world, and wouldn't he make the world sit up? Ha, ha. Quidnuncs and sensation-mongers should presently have something to gape and wag their poisonous tongues over.

> "Where there's a will there's always a way,
> Over the garden wall,"

he hummed, going on purposefully.

He wandered out of a side street into Leith Walk; thence into Waterloo Place and along by the south side of the Calton Hill where stands a school in the guise of a Greek temple. He viewed its columned front with derision: just then he was disposed to deride all things local. The faked enormity should be blown sky-high with dynamite if only as a punishment for pretences.

A minute later he stood looking down the steep slope

of the new Calton Cemetery. In there under the shadow of a boundary wall was the family sepulchre, a dank and grated cell before which he sometimes mused with mingled emotions, asking himself if one day he should lie silent in that dark enclosure, "where the rain erases and the rust consumes," as he was later to write.

But to-day his thoughts were not in the least mortuary; and all nature seemed to share his eagerness, his exhilaration. The sun shone brilliantly on the still city of the dead, making its forest of memorials a gleaming brightness, as if life, not death, should engage men's minds. Beyond the vale, Salisbury Crags were touched to a roseate glow: and below the roofs of Holyrood, "the house of kings," gleamed and sparkled as with living fire. No, emphatically it was no time for sadness.

He turned away, striding swiftly back the way he came. He had not gone more than fifty paces when he heard his own name called from behind, and swinging round he beheld Katie running toward him. He ran to meet her.

"I saw you from away up there," she explained breathlessly, waving a hand at the Calton Hill. "How I did run to catch you, Louis. Oh! dear."

She pressed a hand to her side, trying to smile. Her face was flushed: her eyes were feverishly bright.

"And I was out looking for you, sweetheart," Lewis told her, as excited as herself. "Just come from interviewing your landlady, and as she had no idea where you were I organized a search-party—of one."

"No," said Katie. "She didn't. I don't tell her things. Besides when I came out I didn't know myself where I was going. Did you get my note?" she asked and seemed to hold her breath.

He patted his breast. "Safe in there," he replied. "Safe next my heart. And now, my love," he added quickly, "things are moving. The hour, the big hour of our destiny has come and we must be ready. Hullo! here comes a noddie. Let us take possession of it and decide our course."

The reference was to a horse-cab that came crawling up the hill, the drooping horse, gaunt as Rozinante and much less spirited; the frowsy cabman smoking, cross-legged on the dicky. Lewis hailed him.

"Heh! Johnny, game for a spin, my gay charioteer?"

The horse, being old and wise, stopped automatically: the driver uncoiled his legs, took the black clay from his mouth and surveyed the couple.

"I widnae wonner, if it's made worth my while," he answered. "Was it a birl roond the toon just for pleesure ye was thinkin' o'?"

"Jolly idea," said Lewis. "If you guarantee that in the birlin' o't the steed won't forget and drop off to sleep."

"The steed's a' richt," returned cabby, stroking the horse's bare rump with the handle of his whip. "He's won races in his day."

"Who'd have thought it," said Lewis. "Well! speak a word in his ear about the brave days of old. That'll put him on his mettle."

He opened the cab door and handed Katie in. "We can talk anyway," he whispered in reply to her questioning look.

"Where will ye be for goin'," asked cabby, who somehow fancied he had a pair of tourists. "The Castle, Holyrood, the Royal Mile, Princes Street? This is a braw place for sichts."

"The brawest in the world," agreed Lewis cheerfully.

"But I think a whiff of the Braids air would be good to-day. And you needn't keep to the main streets or mind the show places. We're not interested. And look here, a bob extra if you make good time."

Cabby grinned knowingly.

"No a runaway match, is it? Gretna Green's the place for that."

"Good tip," said Lewis blithely. "Who knows but we may land up there?"

Cabby straightened himself and gathered up the reins.

"Ah! Weel! it's nane o' my business, as the fox said when the bear got trapped."

To evade observation they huddled back in the obscurity of the cab, like guilty children playing a forbidden game. And the game was forbidden. That was at once the incentive and the danger.

Lewis began with a spirited account of his interview with Mrs. Micklebait.

"And by the way," he ended. "She thinks you weren't in bed at all last night, and rather suspects you had a good cry to yourself."

"She had no business to think or say anything of the sort," Katie cried on a spurt of resentment. "I wish people would mind their own affairs and let the affairs of others alone."

"Might as well wish for the millennium," Lewis laughed. "To mind their own business is the last thing in the world that some folk will do. Other people are far too good game, my dear. But you're not sorry we're what we are to each other, are you Katie?"

"Sorry?" she repeated reproachfully. "Oh! Louis! have you forgotten my letter so soon?"

"That'll happen, sweetheart, when I forget every-

thing," he answered, looking into her eyes. "I believe your image is imprinted on my heart."

She slipped an arm through his, snuggling close.

"Then don't be asking foolish questions."

"That means you are happy?"

"Dearest, am I not with you?"

He kissed her rapturously.

"Well! didn't I say we were each for each? Here we are and it's only the beginning, the beginning, sweet, a very small earnest of what is to come. Think what is ahead."

She did not answer. Inwardly she was shivering as with cold. But in his exaltation, his self-absorption Lewis noticed nothing amiss.

CHAPTER XLI

AT THE foot of the Braid Hills, just beyond the city boundary, the cab was dismissed, and Lewis, feeling gloriously rich and unspeakably elated, doubled the promised tip. That day he could afford to be princely and was in the humor to be so. By winding, sequestered paths the pair climbed the ragged, furzy slope arm-in-arm, save where the narrowness of the way made double file impossible, till, reaching the top they beheld the ancient city below them like an outspread map, its cramped, dingy streets, like twisted threads, its spires and towers glimmering duskily in the eternal haze. To each (though neither said so) it bore a strange, vague, remote look, as of a once familiar place seen through the illusion of dreams. Was it, Katie asked herself, the sentiment of farewell?

The flush of excitement had gone from her face, leaving it pathetically white; and her eyes, preternaturally large and strained, held a suggestion of haunting, lurking fear. A close observer would have said her expression told of some heart-racking experience. Her manner, too, was markedly subdued, as from fatigue or perhaps excess of thought. But in his self-centred excitement Lewis was blind to such details. As in previous visits they found a seat in a sunny nook among gorse bushes that made a fragrant enclosure of green and gold.

"Well! here we are, dear heart," said Lewis, folding her in a passionate embrace. "One step more, one little step, and our happiness is complete."

She lay very still, scarcely seeming to breathe, like a child taking refuge from danger. Bent and pressed close to him, her face was hidden, so that he could not observe

the effect of his words: but he felt her quiver in his arms, a quiver, he was certain, of pure rapture.

"You are ready, sweetheart, aren't you?" he asked, bending over her.

Releasing one arm she raised it, encircling his neck tightly. It was often her way of answering fond questions. His pulses throbbed and danced deliriously. Of course he was right. That tense, clinging grip told everything. For several minutes they remained thus in a palpitating silence, as if savoring a bliss too deep, too exquisite for words. Then gently freeing herself Katie sat up. There were tears in her eyes, and Lewis, mistaking the cause, half jocularly upbraided her.

"It is silly," she owned, with a quick decisive wipe.

"And yet natural enough," quoth Lewis, sure he read signs and symptoms aright. "There are tears of joy, aren't there? Well! our chance has come. All we have to do is to seize our happiness."

She plucked nervously at a button of his jacket.

"Louis, dear, I want you to tell me just how things are."

"That's soon done," he answered gayly. "A sentence of banishment has been passed. To-morrow, so it is decreed, I go, though where, the Lord only knows, I don't."

"Banishment! To-morrow," she repeated, her whole being chilled.

"To-morrow morning, bright and early, I expect. Probably the ten train from Waverley. So you see, heart of my heart, there's no time to lose."

She took his hand, stretched out his fingers and fondled them absently. He could feel her own trembling, and he thrilled in response. Certainly extreme happiness was deliciously exciting.

"You mean?" she said, all at once fixing her gaze on his face.

"I mean, dear, that we must be brisk about it, if we're to frustrate those who are scheming to separate us."

She drew in her breath as with a stab of pain.

"How, Louis?"

"Oh!" he answered with just a suspicion of impatience. "I thought you understood. We've got to forestall them, and do it quickly."

"Your father and mother?"

"Yes. You aren't going to tell me you have scruples? When people are downright unreasonable they have only themselves to blame if Nemesis steps in. Our lives are our own to live in our own way, not as others try to dictate. Once upon a time my father and mother pleased themselves. They can't complain if we follow their example, and it must be done at once."

He spoke rapidly, vehemently; secretly he was a little piqued there should be any show on her part of scruple or hesitation.

As she did not answer, he added clinchingly.

"You see, dearest, the need of quick action. Cabby in his grinning way mentioned Gretna Green. Many a piece of good advice is uttered in jest. Suppose we act on it immediately?"

With a jubilant feeling he remembered he had cash for the enterprise.

From somewhere in the bosom of her dress she produced the slim volume he had given her.

"Last night," she said, as it appeared irrelevantly, "I read this for the twentieth time or more. And, Louis, my heart was leaping with pride. Do you know what I said to myself? I said, if it's true what the poet Words-

worth says, that the boy is father of the man then the boy who wrote this will be among the great men of his time."

"Well?" he said watching her face with burning eyes. Flattery was sweet: but just then there were other things that were sweeter still, and most desperately urgent.

"And I'll be prouder yet," she went on. "And not I alone, but the whole world. The day is coming for that."

"Very charming, my dear," he owned. "But away from our present purpose."

"Nothing must be done to spoil his chances," she said, as though she had not heard him. "Nothing. It would be a sin."

Something in her tone struck like an arrow to the marrow of his bones. With a swift, fierce movement he caught her by the wrists in a vice-like grip.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "What do you mean?"

"You are hurting me, dear," she said quietly.

He relaxed his hold instantly, and for thanks she kissed him with a passion of tenderness.

"Katie," he said on a surging breath, that was in reality a gulp of terror. "You're, you're not going back on your promise? I counted on your courage above all things."

"Dearest, I told you I am trying to be brave. It's not cowardly to try to do the best, is it?"

She spoke with amazing calm; contrasted with him she was actually tranquil. For in the silence of the night she had fought her Waterloo; rather passed through her Gethsemane and had conquered. He listened breathless as she added:

"I have thought it all out, Louis. Mrs. Micklebait was right. I wasn't in bed at all last night."

"Not at all?" The words came mechanically. Somehow they seemed to have no meaning.

"No, because I knew I couldn't sleep. Near midnight I wrote that letter and slipped out and posted it. I wanted you to know."

"How much you love me?"

She nodded.

"And surely this is love's call," he urged hotly. "I thought you were quite ready. Are you afraid? Have you lost confidence in me or is the hazard too much for you?"

Again she was silent and he made as if to spring to his feet in anger. Quick as lightning her arms were about him.

"Now dearest, don't get into a temper with me. Don't, don't you see it's all because I love you?"

"That you refuse to come with me?" he retorted.

She was almost choking, and there was heart-break in her voice as she answered:

"Oh! Louis, don't you see, don't you understand how much easier it would be for me to go with you than to stay behind?"

"Then come," he rejoined quickly. "Come now, at once."

"Louis," she pleaded. "Oh! my dearest, don't break down the little self-control I have left. I am not thinking of myself at all: I am thinking of you."

"Then make me happy," he persisted, with the same headlong vehemence. "Keep your promise. I want you Katie, more than anything else on earth. Be mine, my own absolutely."

"I am yours, dearest, absolutely, now and forever.

Only—only," she could scarcely get the words out, "be—a—little—patient.'"

"Patient," he cried in fierce repudiation. "Patience is the wisdom of fools and cowards who are afraid to take what they want. Say you'll come. Say it Katie."

The temptation was overwhelming. She felt her resolution slipping away, like water through one's fingers. Her heart cried out, "Yes, yes. I will go, why shouldn't I?" But something yet more imperative struck in. "No, no. You mustn't, it would be selfish, cowardly to yield."

"And fill you with regrets later," she managed to say, with just the ghost of a smile. "Louis, dear, I must not be a burden, a hindrance, a cause of trouble. Patience isn't the wisdom of fools, as you say. It needs courage to be wise, dearest."

"Oh! Say patience is the wisdom of heroes," he protested hotly. "Perhaps it is. I don't care. If it's folly to want you—now, at once then I'm foolish. It'll be for me to face the music, and I promise you not to show the white feather."

"Listen, Louis," she said, striving her utmost to retain self-command. "You have your father and mother. I have neither. If I had what wouldn't I do to please them, just to see them smile! Yours adore you, at any rate your mother does. I saw that quite plainly. Think of them a little, dear. We can wait."

"Wait?" he echoed almost angrily. "Why should we wait? The future isn't ours except as we use the present. We won't wait. You must come."

A mist swam before Katie's eyes, earth and sky heaved as if meeting and mingling.

"Oh! I am going to faint," she thought. Her heart surged up high in her throat, intensifying the confusion.

With the frenzied effort of one drowning she steadied herself.

"Kiss me, Louis," she said, and held up her face. Instantly her arms were about him as if never to let him go.

"Oh! Louis," she cried in a choking, sobbing voice which to him was a sudden heart-broken wail. "Oh! Louis, my own, my dear, my dear."

In a flash of intuition it came to him what that wailing, heart-stricken cry meant, and his blood became as ice in his veins. It was his pride, his boast that nothing could daunt or depress or turn him aside. His purpose once formed he pursued it, as the hound pursues the hare, blind to all else. And never since he was first conscious of a wish had he set his heart on any other object as he set it on this. With absolute confidence, too, he had reckoned on Katie. Had she not given him the sweet assurance over and over again, that she was his, and for his sake would do or dare anything?

And now in the very moment when he held the cup to his lips it was dashed to the ground and broken. In his very arms, with her heart beating against his, Katie was refusing. Refusing! And her refusal struck the spirit out of him as if it were a mortal wound. Staggered, dumbfounded, he did not think of motives. The overwhelming fact was all that his stupified mind could take in. Was it real, he asked himself, as one dreaming, or was it a sudden ghastly nightmare?

"Is it all up then?" he asked dazedly. She did not answer: only clasped him the tighter. In that clasp he read her despair and his own doom.

Presently he freed himself and sat up, his face between his hands. He made no noise or movement: he just sat

still like one out of whom life has been struck by a sudden blow. Katie gazed at his bent, desolate figure with an infinite overmastering pity.

"Poor boy," she thought. "Darling Louis."

His silent desolation seemed harder to bear than all his passionate pleading. It was on her lips to cry out, "Yes, Louis, I come. I will go with you anywhere for anything no matter what anybody says." But with a dizzying sensation of pain and terror she thrust the words back. No, no, weakness in the time of testing must not mar her great love, her loyalty. It scarcely occurred to her she was sacrificing all that made life precious.

Unable to endure the sight and the pangs it brought she rose abruptly, and he looked up with eyes in which all fire had died. She held out her hand as to a child. "Come dear," she said, and the quietness of her tone astonished herself.

He rose obediently, and hand in hand they went down the slope, Katie taking care to keep to the paths by which they had ascended. That ascent seemed to have been made ages before: so much had happened in the brief interval.

In a secluded spot on the border of green fields they halted.

"Well!" he said, looking at her with eyes that stabbed like daggers.

"We'll go back separately," she answered in a low voice. "And will you please go first, dear."

She had become the leader: somehow, by some subtle power of intuition, he knew that she was the stronger of the two and that protest would be futile. Besides he had no strength for protest.

"It isn't parting, is it Katie?" he asked forlornly.

"Only—for—a—little while, dear," she answered,

smothering a sob. "You know, dearest, what I have told you."

She would have said more; but dared not trust herself. The temptation to linger, to keep him was almost irresistible, but the ordeal was too painful and—and too dangerous.

"I haven't an address to write to," she reminded him. "You won't forget when you are away, will you?"

"You'll hear from me as fast as a letter can come," he answered. "I'll tell you everything. Where I am, how I get on, and above all when I'll be back to claim my own. That'll be the great day, Katie."

Katie smiled wanly.

"I'll be wearying for a letter, Louis. And now, darling, leave me," she added, holding up her face.

He seized her and held her breathless.

"It's damnable I have to go like this," he cried on a spurt of the old rebellion.

"I am so happy in your love, Louis," she murmured, and broke off as if afraid to say more. "And now, my dear one, you have much to do."

She released herself and stood back as in final renunciation. Again he caught and kissed her. Her lips were cold, but he did not notice.

"My love, my soul, good-by, good-by for a little while," he said, his heart pounding, his head giddy.

With that he turned away swiftly. But a dozen paces off he wheeled, strode back and again taking her in his arms almost crushed the breath out of her breast. Neither spoke a word. Next minute she was standing alone. The day was warm, even sultry, yet she shivered as in an icy wind.

At the corner of a little wood Lewis turned and looked back for a last glimpse. She was standing motionless

where he left her, framed against a background of green and gold. He waved his hat thrice as if three were a mystical number, and she waved a hand in response. He had a wild heady impulse to return to her: but knowing her wish he set his face forward and was soon out of sight. But still Katie stood, rigid and motionless, her eyes fixed on the angle of the wood by which he disappeared.

At ten next morning Lewis left Waverley Station by the London train. Often and often he had watched it go out, with a wistful longing to be one of its passengers. To-day his longing was different, and his thoughts reached backward not forward. Katie was not on the platform; that would have been too hazardous a venture. But some distance out, at a prearranged spot, when the great express engine, with the words, " Highland Chief," glinting above its big driving wheels, was settling to its pace she stood to see the train pass. As she gazed, all her senses in her eyes, a fair head was thrust out of a window, its long hair fluttering in the wind. Katie waved her handkerchief frantically. She fancied that Louis saw and responded; but her vision was suddenly blurred and she was not sure. The train thundered on with increasing speed, her unwinking eyes following it till it became a mere speck, and at last was swallowed in the blue distance, leaving what seemed an unfathomable silence.

By and by she turned away, not knowing, scarcely caring whither she went. Presently a lumbering Portobello 'bus came along: mechanically she raised her hand: the bus stopped and she stepped up. Possibly a whiff of the sea air might cool and soothe her beating brain.

The Portobello sands were crowded with romping, boisterous merrymakers: but she walked on, detached, unheeding, like one in a dream, till she passed into the rocky

solitude beyond. Reaching the spot where she had been with Louis, as she felt centuries and centuries ago, she sat down, facing out to seaward. Again the still water gleamed like a vast mirror of molten silver. Above snowy, turreted masses of white cloud, touched here and there with roseate tints, lifted their pinnacles against the vivid blue, giving an impression of ineffable coolness and purity.

Leaning forward, her chin cupped in her hand, she tried to think: but her mind was a frozen confusion. One thing and one thing only was dismally, disastrously clear—Louis was gone. He spoke of returning, poor boy, but she understood things better than he did. In her heart she had always felt how it must be with them. Had she not been fey? And had he not been fey without knowing it? For the fraction of a minute there surged up within her a vehement revolt against the injustice, the tyranny, the cruelty of things as she found them. But she was too tired for fierce anger. Besides what could she do? What but suffer and be mute? Now she was alone. *Alone.*

A gentle wind, scarcely more than a breathing fragrance, stirred softly in the foliage behind her. Not a sign of a human life was anywhere visible. A profound silence possessed the world, a silence that was deepened rather than broken by the low lone, lisping and lapping of the friendless sea.

EPILOGUE

AND so, like a tale that is told, seemed to end the love romance of Robert Louis Stevenson. In truth it lasted to his latest breath. Days were coming, days of loneliness and gloom, scarcely mitigated by a hard-won glory, when he was to recall his lost love with a yearning, an aching of heart that made his widowed life an agonizing regret. Secretly, and seldom with dry eyes, he would repeat to himself the cry of another Robert in the anguish of such another loss.

> Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
> Had we never lov'd sae blindly:
> Never met or never parted,
> We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

For solace he wrote the story of his great passion, meaning one day to give it to the world as his enduring tribute to the girl he worshipped. But jealous eyes fell on it, and it perished. What could not be destroyed was the memory of her beauty, her devotion, her pure unselfish love. The Spae Wife was right. He travelled far, a wanderer and an exile. The dusky warriors and maidens, the tropic sunshine, the flowers, the coral reefs and sapphire seas which once fascinated and fired his young imagination, became part of his life: but through all changes and vicissitudes, and they were many and strange, the bright image of Katie never faded or grew dim. When he thought of her the tropics vanished and he was back among youthful scenes. Often and often she came to meet him in the dawning and the dew, radiant as the morning; and sat beside him as once she sat by old Craigmillar Castle or in Cramond woods or among the furzy

Hills of Braid; and he looked into her eyes, reading truth and fealty in their clear depths; and heard her voice, soft and haunting as a strain of exquisite music; and thrilled to her smile, the sweetest that ever enchanted man. And in surging revolt he asked himself bitterly why two human beings meant by God for each other should be forever sundered by the cruelty and tyranny of man: and he would have given all he possessed, fame, fortune, everything for one short hour with Katie. For she alone of women had revealed to him the magic and the mystery of that immortal thing which mortals call love. To the end he was hers; sometimes he even felt that at the last her name would be found engraven on his heart.

And Katie? She sang no more in the howff. Neither did she go to Paris or Milan or Rome to develop and perfect her wondrous gift, as Bob would have had it were he rich. She vanished from Edinburgh and the ken of all who knew her there. Years later an English tourist visiting a remote spot in the Highlands for "nerves," sat on a sun-bathed rock reading when there chanced to come by two romping children, a boy and a girl, attended by one who was evidently their governess or nurse or both.

"Hullo," shouted the boy in friendly greeting, at sight of the stranger.

"Hullo," responded the stranger affably, slipping from his rock and respectfully saluting the lady in charge.

"Bright youngsters," he remarked, watching them scamper.

"Yes," she replied. "They are dear children."

"Don't seem to mind the solitude," he observed after a pause. "Rather lonely here, I should imagine."

She smiled, very sweetly, he thought.

"Oh! no. Even here there are things to be done, and

busy people are never lonely. Then there are walks; as you see the country is very beautiful. And there are books."

"Books," he repeated. "Are you fond of reading?" It surprised him to discover a lover of books in that *ultima thule.*

"Very fond," was the quiet answer.

"I wonder if you would care for this?" he asked on a note of interest. "Jolly good yarn. All about the Highlands, too. Full of first rate stuff."

He handed her the red-covered volume which was entitled "Kidnapped." She glanced at the author's name, flushed suddenly and as suddenly paled; and he could have sworn her lip trembled. Looking more closely he thought her exceedingly beautiful, with the fragile, spiritual, semi-diaphanous beauty which men somehow associate with nunneries and great renunciations. Perhaps, who knew, she had had some soul-shaking experience. Such things left their mark.

"I have finished it," he said pleasantly, still regarding her curiously. "If you care to read it you shall have it with pleasure."

"Thank you, I'd like to read it," she answered in the same quiet tone.

"Queer chap the author, I believe," he volunteered. "A bit wild in his youth, they say. Ran loose in his native Edinburgh, I'm told, so that all the smug fat-heads of the place were most horribly shocked. But, by Jove! he can write. Try to do a bit that way myself, and I read him for lessons in style."

She made no comment, though it was desperately hard to be silent. Oh! how her heart urged her to speak. But her lips were sealed, forever sealed.

Presently, after a little more talk, the stranger begged her to accept the book as a gift. He liked the place for a change—in summer; its pure air and general restfulness were a splendid tonic. Likely he would be back next year. Would she be there, or would she be off southward with her charges? They were English, weren't they?

"They return to their home in London," she told him. "But I stay here."

"Good. Then I may see you again."

That night, while the household slept, she read "Kidnapped," devouring it word by word, almost letter by letter. That done she set it beside a slim paper-covered volume, "The Story of the Pentland Rising." A long time she sat gazing at them in a sort of hypnotic trance. Strange, oh! how strange, and wonderful beyond words. Her prophecies were fulfilled. All at once her lip quivered, and she bowed her head, covering her face with her hands. The rising sun, peeping through an opening at the edge of the blind, touched her like a benediction, making her hair gleam, black with strands of silver. Growing stronger it crowned her with an aureole of gold.

In the radiance of the dawn she wrote a letter beginning "Darling Louis," and ending, "My true and only love that I never, never forget. You are my first thought in the morning and my last at night. I am waiting for you dearest. Oh! Louis, Louis."

She addressed it to the old address in Edinburgh and sealed it: but on second thoughts it was destroyed.

Next year the stranger returned and looked for her: but he did not find her. True to the last Katie had gone home to wait for Louis.

THE END

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